NOT TO BE ISSUED
OUT OF THE LIBRARY.

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 15 June, 2016

SERMONS
AND
DISCOURSES
ON SEVERAL
SUBJECTS
AND
OCCASIONS.

BY
FRANCIS ATTERBURY, D.D.
Late Lord Biſhop of ROCHESTER,
and Dean of WESTMINSTER.

67055

Publiſhed from the Originals
By THOMAS MOORE, D.D.
His LORDSHIP'S Chaplain.

VOL. III.

The FIFTH EDITION.

LONDON,
Printed for L. DAVIS and C. REYMERS, againſt *Gray's-Inn, Holborn*; B. DOD, in *Ave-Mary-Lane*; J. RIVINGTON, in *St. Paul's Church-yard*; W. JOHNSTON, in *Ludgate-ſtreet*; and M. COOPER, in *Pater-noſter Row*.
MDCCLXI.

00067055

The PUBLISHER'S

PREFACE.

THE following Sermons being the Genuine Works of that Great, but Unfortunate Prelate, whoſe Name they bear (as I aſſure the World, bating the Errors of the *Preſs*, they all of them are, and as the inimitable *Style* in which they are written, proves them to be) there needs no Apology for the Publication of them: That they are *His* is ſufficient to juſtify their Appearance in *Print*; and to recommend them likewiſe to the

Reader: For his Enemies and Friends ſeem all to agree in *this* Part of his Character, That he was as Judicious, Inſtructive, Convincing Perſuaſive, and Delightful a *Preacher*, as ever *England* bred.

The only Excuſe therefore, that I think myſelf obliged to make on this Occaſion, is, for not *Publiſhing* more of them, than what are contained in theſe *two* poſthumous Volumes; for every one will naturally conclude, that he left a great *many* more behind him, having been a *conſtant* Preacher for about Twenty Years, and an *occaſional* one a great deal longer.

The true Reaſon of my not doing it then is this: He burnt a good

good many of them himſelf at *Paris*, and, by a Writing found among what were left, ſignified, that *theſe* were the only ones fit to be printed; ſo that without acting contrary to the Biſhop's Opinion of his own Performances, of which he was certainly the beſt Judge, no more *could*, and therefore no more *ought* to be Publiſhed: And it being from thence reſolved, that no more *ſhould*, the only effectual Way of preventing it, was, to commit the reſt to the Flames. Which was accordingly done, in my Preſence, by *William Morice*, Eſq; his Dutiful and Worthy Son-in-Law, and Executor. To whom I take this Opportunity of Acknowledging myſelf much obliged for ſeveral conſiderable Acts of Friendſhip; but particularly for the Benefit of Publiſh-

ing theſe pious Remains of my dear Friend and Patron, whom I greatly Admired, Loved, and Reverenced; and to whoſe Memory I therefore Dedicate them, with a Heart full of Gratitude and Reſpect.

THO. MOORE.

THE

THE CONTENTS OF THE Third VOLUME.

SERMON I.

THE Public Manner, in which the Goſpel was at firſt promulged, one conſiderable Argument of its Divine Authority.

ACTS xxvi. 26.

This Thing was not done in a Corner.

The frequent Attempts of Infidelity make it neceſſary for the Miniſters of the Goſpel to apologize for it, as if it were in its Infant State. Pag. 1, 2

I. The fair, open, and illuſtrious Manner, in which it was promulged, a ſtrong Argument of the Truth of it. 3

Our Saviour opened his Commiſſion without any Partiſans or Followers, and lived afterwards chiefly in Towns and Cities.

His Miracles performed often upon the moſt ſolemn and remarkable Occaſions. 5, 6

As his Life was public, ſo was his Death and Reſurrection. 7, 8

II. Reflexions that ariſe from hence, are,

1. The great Advantage which the Chriſtian Religion has on this Account over all other Religions. 9

The Credibility of *Numa's* Conferences with a Goddeſs, and of *Mahomet's* receiving Part of the *Alcoran* from the Angel *Gabriel*, depends ſolely on their own Teſtimony; Neither of them wrought Miracles to confirm their Doctrines. 9, 10

The Miracles ſaid to be wrought in the *Eaſt* and *Weſt Indies* are reported by Perſons ſo much later than the Facts them-

themſelves, that we can have no Rational Aſſurance of them. 10

2d. the Truth of the *Jewiſh* Revelation depends, as the Infidels object, on the Teſtimony of Friends only. 11

2. The inexcuſable and incurable Obſtinacy of thoſe, who, notwithſtanding the open inconteſtable Manner, in which the Divine Authority of the Goſpel was manifeſted, continue ſtill to ſtand out againſt it. 12—14

3. The Vanity of Pretences to Miracles in the *Romiſh* Communion; which have been generally done *privately*, in Religious Houſes and Places of Retirement, or in remote Regions of the World, whither no one will go to diſprove them; or in ſuperſtitious Countries, where no Man has Inclination or Leave to diſprove them. 15, 16

The Vanity particularly of Tranſubſtantiation, the moſt abſurd Pretence of all. 18, 19

Private Viſions and Illuminations, being

ing

ing a ſort of Miracles tranſacted only between God and the Souls of thoſe that pretend to them, can never be made a Foundation for the Reception of any Doctrine. 19, 22

5. A Doctrine once eſtabliſhed upon inconteſtable Miracles, needs not to be confirmed by new ones in After Ages. 22, 23

6. The more any Doctrine affects *Secrecy*, the more Reaſon we have to ſuſpect it. 24.

The Church of *Rome*, that preſcribes implicit Belief, and the Enthuſiaſts, that ſet up their Doctrine of the Dictates of the Spirit, both to be ſuſpected on this Account. 25, 26

The Conduct of the Church of *England* in this Particular. 26, 27

7. Our Practice of the Goſpel ought to be like the firſt Proofs of it, plain and conſpicuous. 29, 30

SER-

SERMON II.

The Baptiſt's Meſſage to *Jeſus*; and *Jeſus's* Anſwer explained.

MATTH. xi. 3.

Art thou He that ſhould come, or do we look for another?

The Occaſion of the Text opened. 31, 32, 33

I. The Reaſon of this *Meſſage* from the Baptiſt. 33, 34

His Diſciples were at that Time incredulous, notwithſtanding they had been frequently inſtructed concerning the Meſſiah,

1. Becauſe their Maſter being now in Priſon, they might apprehend, if *Jeſus* had been the Meſſiah, he would have exerted his Power to deliver him. 34

2. They might have obſerved, that our Saviour had not himſelf hitherto aſſerted his Right to that Title. 35

3. Their

3. Their Suſpicions might be increaſed by obſerving, that our Saviour's Life had leſs Appearance of outward Sanctity in it, than their Maſter's. 35

II. In the *Reply*, the *Manner* of it remarkable, becauſe it gave the Diſciples an Occaſion of anſwering that Queſtion themſelves, which they had propoſed to our Bleſſed Saviour. 37

The *Matter* of it remarkable,

1. For the *Gradation* of its Particulars, the laſt of which was an Inſtance of Condeſcenſion the *Jews* had before been but little acquainted with. 38

2. For the *Appoſiteneſs* of it in relation to the Perſons that made the Enquiry: For,

Firſt, Since they were not to be convinced by Oral Teſtimony, they are taught to judge of the Meſſiah by the Works they ſaw in him. 40

Secondly, Miracles were a Proof of our Saviour's Pre-eminence over their Maſter, and were known to be one diſcriminating Marks of his being the Meſſiah. 41

Thirdly, The particular Facts our Saviour mentions, all of them Acts of Benevolence, were rightly ſuited to inſinuate that Pre-eminence, and to correct thoſe ill Notions the Diſciples might have conceived from their Maſter's rigid Auſterities. 42

Fourthly, The Anſwer is expreſſed in Words taken from the Prophet *Iſaiah*, whoſe Writings had more particularly pointed out their own Maſter, and in which conſequently they had been moſt converſant. 43—46

The Paſſage in the Text is remarkable for its containing the chief Marks and Characters of ſuch Miracles as are ſufficient to confirm the Authority of any Perſon pretending to be ſent from God. 50, 52,

An Exhortation to Attention in peruſing the ſeveral Parts of Scripture, which, like the Works of Nature, always appear the more wonderful, the more they are looked into. 49—53

SER-

SERMON III.

On the Incarnation of our Lord.

MATTH. xi. 6.

Bleſſed is he, whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

Notwithſtanding the endearing Marks of our Saviour's Love to Mankind, his Doctrine, his Myſteries, or his Perſon have to ſome been always Matter of Offence. *Page* 55—57

The Objections againſt the Incarnation, drawn from the *Impoſſibility*, or the *Unreaſonableneſs* of it, ſtated. 58, 59

I. We know too little of the Human or Divine Nature to prove an Union of them *impoſſible*. 60

We can as little explain or comprehend an Union of Souls and Bodies, as we can that of the Deity with Humanity. 61

And if the Spirits of Men had been once unbodied, and ſuch a Doctrine revealed to them in a State of Separation, it would have appeared to ſome

ſome forward Reaſoners as unphiloſophical and abſurd. 62

V. The Method, which Infinite Goodneſs and Wiſdom has made uſe of for our Redemption, we muſt needs think the moſt *proper* of any. 63

Reaſons which Scripture ſuggeſts to us, why our Redeemer ſhould be God. 64

And why he ſhould be Man. 65

Practical Improvements from this Doctrine are,

1. Thankfulneſs, that we are admitted to Terms of Repentance, which before we could have no Aſſurance of. 67

2. Love for our Saviour's Infinite Condeſcenſion. 69

The Force of this Motive ſtrangely weakned by thoſe, who make him a mere Man. 70

3. A high Senſe of the *Dignity of our Nature*, and a hearty *Diſpleaſure* at thoſe Sins that debaſe and diſhonour it. 71

4. A Spirit of *Univerſal Humility*. 73

5. A ſe-

5. A ſedulous Care to trace all the Steps of that Example our Saviour ſet us in the Fleſh, which the Teacher might ſet us, was one great End of his taking our Nature upon him. 74, 75

6. A due eſteem for that everlaſting Goſpel, which *Chriſt* ſealed with his Blood; and, as the beſt Expreſſion of our Eſteem for it, a ſtrict Compliance with the Terms of it. 75—78

SER-

SERMON IV.

Temptations not irreſiſtible.

1 COR. x. 13.

God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the Temptation alſo make a Way to eſcape.

The common Plea with Libertines, that human Nature is too weak to reſiſt Temptations. 79, 80

I. Under what Reſtrictions the Truth of the Text to be underſtood. 82—84

II. This Maxim when duly ſtated, confirmed.

1. From Experience, and the Examples of ſeveral holy Men recorded in Scripture Hiſtory. 86—93

2. From ſome general Reaſonings drawn from the Nature of Temptations themſelves; of that Goſpel Grace, which is to ſupport us under them; of Man, a free Agent; and of God, who is a holy, juſt, and true one. 93—99

III. This Doctrine affords Matter of *Comfort* and *Encouragement* to the ſincerely Good and Virtuous. 100, 101
And of *Reproof* to the Hypocrite and Profane, who would extenuate their Sins, by reproaching human Nature, and under that, the wiſe Author and Contriver of it. 102, 103
An Exhortation to beg of God his Strength and Protection to carry us through all Temptations. 103—106

SERMON V.

The horrid Imprecation of the *Jews*, and the Juſtice and Wiſdom of God in fulfilling it upon them.

MATTH. xvii. 25.

Then anſwered all the People, and ſaid: His Blood be on us, and on our Children.

The Hiſtory of the *Jewiſh* Nation a Hiſtory of divine Providence. 107, 108

I. The

I. The aggravating Circumſtances with which the Imprecation in the Text was attended, and the Solemnity, Unanimity, and Warmth with which it was expreſſed. 109—113

II. The wonderful Manner with which it was accompliſhed, in the Deſtruction of the City and Nation of the *Jews*. 113

A ſtrict Correſpondence obſervable between their Crime and their Puniſhment. 114

They are ſtill purſued with ſuch Circumſtances of divine Vengeance, as are very different from thoſe of other Exiles or Captives, and from what befel them in their former Diſperſions. 116—119

III. The *Juſtice* of God vindicated, in reſpect to theſe *Sufferers*. 119

His *Wiſdom*, with regard to the great Ends and Deſigns he propoſed to himſelf in their *Sufferings*; *viz.* by making them in their *Deſtruction* an irrefragable Proof of our Saviour's Divine Miſſion. 120

And in their *Diſperſion*, a Means of

propagating thoſe divine Oracles that foretold and deſcribed him. 121, 122

IV. The Inferences to be deduced from hence are,

1. To abſtain from all raſh and horrid Imprecations, and to aim at Simplicity of Speech, as well as Sincerity of Heart and Integrity of Manners. 123—125

2. To admire the inſcrutable Methods of God's Providence, in bringing about the Salvation of Sinners; and making the Scandal of the Croſs ſoon turn to its greateſt Advantage. 125, 126

3. To attribute the Infidelity of thoſe Men to a judicial Blindneſs, who live where the Goſpel of *Chriſt* is profeſſed, and yet ſhut their Eyes againſt the Light of it. 126—128

4. To be fearful of deſpiſing the Mercies of God, and falling into that Sin, by which God's peculiar People forfeited his Protection and Favour. 128—131

SER-

SERMON VI.

The Chriſtian State, a State of Suffering.

1 PET. ii. 21.

Even hereunto were ye called; becauſe Chriſt alſo ſuffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye ſhould follow his Steps.

The Duty of a Chriſtian to imitate the Paſſive, as well as the Active Graces of his Saviour. 133, 134
The chief Deſign of St. *Peter* in this Epiſtle. 135, 136
I. The State of a Chriſtian a State of Suffering, proved from Scripture. 138, 139
From the ſolemn Engagements into which he entered at his Baptiſm. 140
The *outward* Afflictions he meets with from the World. 140—142
The *inward* Anxieties and Sorrows, Perplexities and Troubles that attend him. 142—145

Since this is the State we are *called* to, it behoves us to examine whether we are really in ſuch a State, and have fulfilled the Duties that entitle us to the Privileges of it. 146—148

II. The Sufferings of *Chriſt* a plain Argument why we ſhould likewiſe expect our Share of them. 149

Neither his infinite Dignity, nor his perfect Sanctity made him exempt from them. 150, 151

And ſince we are *predeſtinate to be conformed to his Image*, as far as we deviate from that Original, ſo far we fall ſhort of Perfection. 151, 152

His Example a Powerful Motive to ſupport us. 152

By the Merit of thoſe very Sufferings, which he propoſes to our Imitation, he has purchaſed for us all ſuch extraordinary Aids as are requiſite to ſupport us. 153—157

SER-

SERMON VII.

Some Reaſons aſſigned for our Saviour's appearing chiefly to the Apoſtles after his Reſurrection, and his Manner of converſing with them repreſented.

ACTS i. 3.

To whom alſo he ſhewed himſelf alive after his Paſſion by many infallible Proofs, being ſeen of them forty Days, and ſpeaking of the Things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

St. *Chryſoſtom's* Obſervation why the Apoſtles were allowed to behold our Saviour aſcending up into Heaven, but not to ſee him in the Act of riſing from the Dead. 159, 160

I. Reaſons aſſignable from Scripture why our Saviour continued upon Earth for ſome Time after his Reſurrection, *viz.*

To give the Apoſtles convincing Proofs of it, 162

To remove their Prejudices in relation to his Sufferings, and to inform them of the ſpiritual Nature of his Kingdom. 162, 163

To prepare them for his Departure. 163, 164

And we may venture to add, to give a further proof of his Concern for the good of Souls, by thus delaying for ſome Time to enter upon that Glory which his Humiliation had purchaſed. 164, 165

Why the Time of his Stay, was for *forty Days*. 166

II. Reaſons why our Saviour appeared only to his Followers, and not to the *Sanhedrim*, or Body of the *Jews* aſſembled at the Paſſover.

1. So far was he from being obliged to afford thoſe who crucified him ſuch an extraordinary Proof of his Reſurrection, that he might with great Juſtice have denied them any Evidence at all of it. 169, 170

2. Thoſe that had rejected the Evidence already offered them, would not

not have been convinced by ocular Aſſurance. 170, 171

Should we ſuppoſe ſuch glaring Evidence could not have been reſiſted by them, yet it ought not to have been indulged to them for this very Reaſon, becauſe it was *irreſiſtible*. 172

The true Queſtion in relation to our Saviour's Reſurrection is, Whether the Proof of it is not abundantly full to all the Purpoſes of Conviction. 173

Many Things we in our Wiſdom may poſſibly think fit to have been done, which God has not thought fit to do for us. 173—175

III. The Manner of our Saviour ſpending his Time with the Apoſtles after his Reſurrection, was,

1. By giving them *many infallible Proofs* of his being returned to Life. 177

2. By Inſtructing them in *Things pertaining* to the Goſpel Diſpenſation, of which they were to be the Miniſters. 179

Our Faith entitled to a greater Reward, than

than that of the Apoſtles themſelves. 183, 184
An Exhortation to the Exerciſe of it in the Participation of the bleſſed Sacrament. 185, 186

SERMON VIII.

Miracles the moſt proper Way of proving the divine Authority of any Religion.

MARK xvi. 20.

And they went forth, and preached every where; the Lord working with them and confirming the Word with Signs following.

The Succeſs of the Apoſtles preaching owing to a divine Power and Aſſiſtance that accompanied them. 188
Miracles the Foundation upon which both the *Moſaic* and *Chriſtian* Revelation ſtand. 189, 190
I. Miracles, according to the common Senſe of Mankind, the proper Medium of proving a Religion to be a divine Appointment. 191
Though all Religions have at their

firſt Riſe equally pretended to them, it does not follow that they can be no certain Argument of a true one. 192—194
II. The Reaſonableneſs and Neceſſity of this Sort of Evidence, ſhewn from the general Nature of it. 194
A Doctrine, tho' pure and holy, cannot be itſelf an Evidence of its own divine Original. 195—197
Tho' Miracles are not neceſſary to induce a Belief of *Moral* Truths, yet they are to atteſt ſuch as are of *poſitive* Inſtitution. 198—200
III. The Propriety of this Sort of Evidence ſhewn from the peculiar Characters and Properties of it. 200
1. Miracles extremely fit to awaken Men's Attention. 201
The Fathers of the Eaſtern Miſſion endeavoured to make up this Diſadvantage, by ſome curious and ſurpriſing Works of Art. 201, 202
2. They are the ſhorteſt and moſt expeditious Way of Proof. 202—204
3. And

3. And of univerſal Force and Efficacy. 204—206

Since the Proof of the Chriſtian Faith is ſound and ſatisfactory, it is our Duty to adhere to it ſtedfaſtly. 206

Credulity and Weakneſs has much the Advantage of Infidelity, with regard to the Eaſe and Peace of Mind it affords in this World, and is more likely, if it errs, to be pardoned by God in another. 207, 208

SERMON IX.

The difficult Paſſages of Scripture vindicated from ſuch Objections as are uſually made to them, and proper Directions given how we are to uſe them.

2 PET. iii. 6.

In which are ſome Things hard to be underſtood, which they that are unlearned and unſtable wreſt, as they do alſo the other Scriptures.

The Deſign of St. *Peter* in this Epiſtle, and the Connection of the Text cleared. 209—213

I. Seve-

I. Several Particulars in St. *Paul's* Writings, and in the other Scriptures alſo, hard to be underſtood. 214—217

II. To account for theſe Obſcurities even in the Apoſtles Time, it is to be obſerved, that the Writers of them, tho' under the immediate Inſpiration of the Holy Ghoſt, were left to expreſs themſelves after their own particular Manner. 218

The Nature of ſome Things they delivered was ſo obſcure, that the Language of Men muſt needs fall ſhort of them. 219

If ſome Paſſages were of uncertain Meaning at that Time, there muſt be more ſo to us who live at this Diſtance from the Age of the Apoſtles. 220, 221

The Eaſtern Manner of thinking and ſpeaking, at the Time eſpecially when the Scriptures were writ, widely different from ours, who live in this Age, and this Quarter of the World. 221

And the particular Occaſions, upon which ſome

ſome Parts of them were writ, entirely unknown to us. 222

The Multiplicity of Commentators that have ſtarted all poſſible Senſes of Scripture, have caſt a Miſt over many Places of it, which of themſelves were plain and clear. 223

III. Theſe Obſcurities are no Reflexion on the *Goodneſs* of God, which is not obliged to do every thing for us that is *poſſible* to be done, but only that which is *fitting* and ſufficient for the End it deſigns. 225

Scripture ſufficient for the End to which it was deſigned, becauſe tho' not equally perſpicuous throughout, yet it is in the main and for the moſt Part ſo. 226

And wherever it is hard to be underſtood, is on that Account not *neceſſary* to be underſtood. 227

Nor are theſe Obſcurities a Reflexion on the *Wiſdom* of God, becauſe they are none of them ſo difficult as to be utterly unintelligible. 228

They anſwer ſeveral wiſe Ends of Providence,

vidence, particularly they ſerve to humble the Preſumption and Pride of Man. 230
To ſecure the Majeſty of Religion. *ibid*
To exerciſe our Induſtry, and engage our Attention. 230
To be the Teſt of ingenuous and well diſpoſed Minds. 232
To make us long for that bleſſed State and Time, when all Doubts ſhall be cleared, and the Veil taken off from all Myſteries. 233

SERMON X.

On the ſame Text.

Reflexions that ariſe from the preceeding Diſcourſe,
1. The Folly of thoſe Men, who endeavour from the Obſcurity of ſome Parts of Scripture, entirely to deſtroy the Authority of it. 238
A Book deſigned to open to us ſome Diſcoveries concerning the Divine Nature, its Eſſence, and ineffable Perfections, were much to be ſuſpected

pected not to be of divine Authority, if it had nothing abſtruſe and difficult. 239—242

It cannot be ſaid to be an inſufficient Rule of Faith and Practice, ſince it is ſo far clear as to reach the End it is intended for. 242—244.

The Doctrines of the Divinity of *Chriſt* and the Holy Ghoſt, and the like, tho' not plainly contained in every Text of Scripture which ſpeaks of them, yet are clearly enough delivered in ſome one Text or other to demand our Belief of them. 245, 246

Tho' they may be no where expreſſed with the utmoſt Degree of Evidence that Words are capable of, yet they are ſo expreſſed that an honeſt impartial Mind cannot well miſs the Senſe of them. 246, 247

Had all Points of Doctrine been ſo minutely explained, as to ſhut out the Poſſibility of any miſtaken Meaning, the Bible would have been too voluminous in Bulk, and too ſubtle in its Nature, for common uſe. 248

The

The Diſputes concerning the Meaning of ſeveral the moſt important Texts, no Argument againſt the Clearneſs of them. 249—257

They that reject Revelation on account of its Obſcurity, muſt reject natural Religion, nay Atheiſm itſelf on the ſame Account. 252

2. The Obſcurity of ſeveral Paſſages in Scripture does not prove the Neceſſity of an infallible Judge to determine the meaning of them, becauſe none of thoſe Points that are obſcure, are neceſſary to be determined. 254

3. Leſs reaſonable ſtill, to make *ſome* dark Paſſages in Scripture, a Pretence of locking up *all* at once from the Generality of *Chriſtians*. 255

Upon the ſame Grounds the People in the *Romiſh* Church are denied the Liberty of reading Scripture, they might have been debarred the Privilege of our Saviour's Converſation while he lived on Earth. 256

4. The ill Uſe of the Doctrine of the

Text being removed, the moſt proper Uſe we can make of it, is, to form in ourſelves deep Humility, and Lowlineſs of Mind, when we peruſe the ſacred Oracles. 257—259

SERMON XI.

On the ſame Text.

The latter Part of the Text explained, in which the Apoſtle mentions the ill Impreſſions which the difficult Parts of Scripture made on the Minds of weak *Chriſtians.* 261, 262

To ſtate the juſt Bounds, and vindicate the Reaſonableneſs of St. *Peter's* Aſſertion, it is to be conſidered,

1. That to *wreſt* the Scriptures, doth not in Strictneſs of Speech ſignify to miſunderſtand it through Weakneſs and Ignorance, but willfully to pervert it, to make it fall in with our corrupt Opinions and Prejudices. 264
2. That the Paſſages ſo perverted, were ſuch as were hard to be underſtood,

and therefore not neceſſary to be underſtood, 265

And farther, were ſuch as did not treat Points indifferent, but of the greateſt Moment. 266

3. That this forced Interpretation of obſcure Paſſages, was in Oppoſition to other plain evident ones. 267

Thoſe that wreſt Scripture with all theſe aggravating Circumſtances, may juſtly be ſaid to wreſt them to their Deſtruction. 268, 269

From the Scriptures being turned to ill Purpoſes in the Apoſtles Days, we learn, not to wonder if they were ſo in After-Times. 270

And if ſuch unexceptionable Interpreters of their own Writings could not ſecure them from Miſrepreſentation, the great Expediency of an infallible Judge is not ſo clear as is pretended. 272, 273

From St. *Peter's* Aſſertion we learn, that we ought to bring with us a right Intention of Mind, when we read the holy Scriptures. 274

And an humble Temper of Mind, rightly diſpoſed and qualified to purſue that Intention. 275

To moderate our Curioſity, by keeping this Maxim in Mind, that there's no Place hard, which is needful to be underſtood by us. 277

Never to expound hard Places of Scripture ſo as to oppoſe clear ones. 279

If there is ſo much Danger in perverting obſcure Paſſages of Scripture, a higher Puniſhment is reſerved for thoſe who affront and ridicule it. 283

SERMON XII.

A Diſcourſe on Religious Sincerity, wherein the true Marks and Teſts of it are fully ſet forth.

2 COR. xiii. 5.

Examine yourſelves whether ye be in the Faith, prove yourſelves.

Three Ranks of Men, into which thoſe that

that name the Name of *Chriſt* may be divided, *viz.* Such as are confirmed in Wickedneſs; or ſuch as are confirmed in Virtue; or the Doubtful and Wavering. 285

The Exhortation of the Text directed to the latter of them. 287

Some Marks or Teſts propoſed, by which a Man may try his own Sincerity, *viz.*

If his Reſolutions of Obedience are *univerſal* and *unlimited.* 289—291

2. If an even Tenor of *Goodneſs* is viſible in his Conduct. 291—295

3. If he is not content with any determined Proportion of Goodneſs, which he has already attained, but aims at a farther Degree of Proficiency in it. 295—297

4. If he is as ready to exerciſe the ſecret Virtues of a *Chriſtian* as the public ones. 297—299

5. If he acts not on Bye Aims and private Intereſt, but upon a true Zeal for the Honour of God, the Intereſt of Virtue, and the Good of Mankind. 299—301

6. The

6. The Doubts that good Men entertain concerning their own Condition, are, if they had but the Heart to think ſo, a ſure Reaſon why they ſhould not doubt of it. 302—305

7. A Taſte and Reliſh for the Holy Scriptures, a ſure Token by which the experienced Pſalmiſt teaches us to know a good Man. 305—309

ADVER-

ADVERTISEMENT.

SINCE the Printing of theſe Volumes, I find the Name of Atterbury *ſo injuriouſly and ſcurrilouſly treated in an Hiſtory juſt now publiſhed, that, to obviate all ill Impreſſions of him, which the Reader may poſſibly receive from thence, I judge it not amiſs to give him a true Notion of the Hiſtorian's Character, taken out of the Preface to Dr.* Hickes's *three Treatiſes publiſhed in* 1709, *where it is thus ſaid of him:*—He was famous for his great Freedom in cenſuring the Clergy; inſomuch, that when he pretended ſometimes to commend a few of the beſt, and brighteſt of them, who were eſteemed the Ornaments of the Church, he was obſerved to do it with ſo many *Butts*, and Exceptions, that, like the Adjuncts, which deſtroy their Subject, they nulled the Praiſes he pretended to give, and turned them almoſt into perfect Diſgrace. *And the ſame Author, after giving us a Specimen of the Hiſtorian's Ill-will in general towards the Clergy, by reciting a Paſſage out of the firſt Volume of* this very Hiſtory,

Hiſtory, *then ſhewn him in Manuſcript (which I think too groſs to repeat) concludes his Account of him with this ſtinging Reflexion :*——Were I ſo vain, as to deſire to live in Hiſtory, it ſhould be in *this*, upon Condition the Writer of it would not ſpeak *well* of me, but *ill* : For the Defamations of ſuch Hiſtorians are certain Signs of Merit; the Dishonourable Characters of ſuch vile Pens, are true Marks of Honour; and their Praiſes and Penegyrics, like the Pillory, are Infamy, Scandal, and Diſgrace. So will jealous and inquiſitive Poſterity think of the Characters in this *Anecdot*; they will interpret them all, whether good or bad, by the *Rule of Contrary*; they will believe nothing upon the bare Report of the Author, but be apt to think ill of thoſe, of whom he ſpeaks well, and well of all, of whom he ſpeaks ill.

I ſhall add no Reflexions of my own on this Occaſion, for I think there needs none, but leave the World to judge, how far Dr. Hickes's *Words are verified in* Burnet's *Hiſtory, and the Reputation it bears.*

The GOSPEL *openly publiſhed.*

A

SERMON

Preached at

Weſtminſter-Abbey,

November 1, 1718.

ACTS xxvi. 26.

This Thing was not done in a Corner.

IT might be hoped, that, in a Coun- SERM. I.
try, where the Religion of *Chriſt* is not only publicly profeſſed, but interwoven into the Civil Frame, and eſtabliſhed by a Law, the Truth of Chriſti-

SERM. I. anity might, at all times, be taken for granted; and that the Miniſters of *Chriſt* might have nothing to do, but to build on that Foundation, and be ever employed in exciting Men to a Practice ſuitable to their Profeſſion, and to *adorn the Doctrine of our God and Saviour in all things.* But, alas! the frequent and daring Attempts of *Infidelity* that interrupt us in our Courſe, make it neceſſary for us to *lay again the Foundation* (as the Apoſtle ſpeaks) and to apologize for Chriſtianity, juſt as if it were now in its infant State, and newly ſetting forth in the World.

Tit. ii. 10.

Heb. vi. 1.

God forgive *Them*, who put us upon this unwelcome Taſk!— In the mean time *We*, I'm ſure, were not to be forgiven, ſhould we appear leſs ſolicitous to ſupport and vindicate that Faith, into which we were baptized, and to the Preaching of which we are peculiarly dedicated, than ſome Men are to undermine and deſtroy it. And of *All* the Circumſtances which add a particular Strength to the Evidence given for the Truth of the

Goſpel, there is none more advantageous to it, than the Conſideration of that *Fair*, *Open*, and *Illuſtrious* Manner, wherein it was proved, and propagated by *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles. There was no Affectation of *Privacy* in what they ſaid, or did; their Doctrines were preached, and their Miracles wrought in broad Day-light, and in the Face of the World; in the moſt frequented Places, before thouſands, and ten thouſands of Witneſſes: *This thing*, ſays St. *Paul*, in his admirable Apology before *Agrippa* and *Feſtus*, *was not done in a Corner*. SERM. I.

I ſhall briefly open and *illuſtrate* this Truth, in order to (what I chiefly intend) the drawing from thence ſome uſeful *Obſervations* and *Improvements* which it will naturally afford us.

Firſt, When our Saviour began to publiſh the Goſpel of his Kingdom, he did not, as Deceivers uſe to do, vent his new Doctrines, or pretend to perform his Wonders (the Evidence of his divine Miſſion) in Places where there was no body fit to I.

SERM. I. oppoſe the One, or to diſprove the Other. From the firſt Moment he entered upon his Office, he appeared *publicly*, he taught, he converſed, he did Miracles *publicly* [not gaining upon Mankind by *Stealth*, not opening his Pretences *Darkly* at firſt, and to a *Few*, and then, by their Means, drawing in Others, and going on thus *under-hand* to form an Intereſt, and to eſtabliſh a party, which, as ſoon as he ſhould make his Public Claim, might immediately come in to him, ſupport, and own him. No] he broke out upon the World *all at once*, came into the midſt of Men without any Partiſans, or Followers, preſently opened his Commiſſion, and took upon himſelf the Character of an Ambaſſador from Heaven.

Throughout the whole Courſe of his Miniſtry, he addreſſed himſelf conſtantly to *Multitudes*, lived chiefly in great *Towns* and *Cities*, and in the moſt *frequented* Parts of them, the *Streets*, the *Market-places*, the *Temple*, and the *Synagogues*; where his Life and Doctrine, and

and Miracles might, by his profeſſed Enemies, be narrowly Obſerved and Examined. And if at any time he withdrew into the Deſert, and did Wonders there, it was not in order to fly the Eyes of Men, but that he might have *Room*, by that means, to manifeſt his divine Power, and preach his Heavenly Truths to yet greater Numbers. [Accordingly we find with him in the Wilderneſs three thouſand Witneſſes of a Miracle, at One time, and even five thouſand at Another.] And therefore, when the High Prieſt queſtioned him concerning his Diſciples and his Doctrine, he made this Reply; *I ſpake openly to the World, I ever taught in the Synagogue, and in the Temple whither the* Jews *always reſort; and in Secret have I ſaid nothing: Why aſkeſt thou me? Aſk them which heard me, What I have ſaid unto them; behold, they know what I ſaid.* SERM. I.

The *Beginning* of Miracles that *Jeſus* did was before much Company, at a Marriage Feaſt; and the laſt he wrought were in the midſt of *Jeruſalem*, where

SERM. I. the whole Nation of the *Jews* were *then* aſſembled to celebrate the Paſſover. And whenever he manifeſted his Divine Miſſion by the chief Seal and Evidence of it, his raiſing any one from the Dead, he took care at that time eſpecially to be ſurrounded with numbers.

He pitched upon ſuch Perſons for the Subjects of his miraculous Cures, whoſe Infirmities and Diſeaſes were notorious, and of a long ſtanding; One, who had been blind from his very Birth; Another diſeaſed with an Iſſue of Blood twelve Years; and a Third, troubled with a Palſy for thirty-eight Years; ſo that there could be no poſſible Confederacy in a Caſe, where the Perſon cured was known to have laboured under that Diſtemper ſome Years before our Saviour was born.

He ſo ordered the matter, that ſome of thoſe he healed ſhould immediately repair to the *Phariſees* and *Prieſts*, his inveterate and Powerful Enemies, and give *them* an Opportunity of detecting the Fraud, if there were any: That others

others ſhould be ſoon after called before the Sanhedrin itſelf, and ſtrictly queſtioned about the Reality of their Cure, that ſo theſe Facts might have the Earlieſt and Strongeſt Confirmation poſſible from the fruitleſs Enquiry and Oppoſition of thoſe, who were moſt loth to believe them. At leaſt, when he healed any Perſon in private, without thus directing him to notify the Cure, he then enjoined Secrecy to him, on purpoſe to obviate all poſſible Suſpicions of Art and Contrivance. SERM. I.

As he had *Lived*, ſo he *Died* in *Public*; Expired upon a Croſs, in the Top of an Eminence near *Jeruſalem*. When Buried, he had a public Guard ſet upon his Grave, and he Aroſe from thence in the Preſence of that very Guard, and to their Aſtoniſhment. He appeared afterwards to five hundred Brethren at once, to the twelve Diſciples frequently; Eat, Drank, and Converſed with them for forty Days, and was at laſt taken up, into Heaven in their Sight, by a Slow and Leiſurely Aſcent.

SERM. I. In all Reſpects and Circumſtances the Goſpel of *Chriſt* ſhewed itſelf to proceed from the great *Father of Lights, in whom is no Darkneſs at all*; it was eſtabliſhed upon Proofs, as Authentic, Public, and Solemn, as can well be imagined; Bright, Evident, and Powerful, as the Sun at Noon Day. As its Founder once appealed to his Diſciples, and ſaid, *Handle me, and ſee; for a Spirit hath not Fleſh and Bones, as ye ſee me have*; ſo may the Doctrine itſelf make a like Challenge to its Enemies, and ſay; "Handle me, and ſee; for Deluſion "and Impoſture hath not ſuch Subſtan"tial Evidences, ſo Open, Ocular and "Senſible a Demonſtration to boaſt of, as "I have."—*This Thing was not done in a Corner.*

Luk. xxiv. 39.

II. *Secondly*, Having thus briefly Explained and Illuſtrated the Truth contained in theſe Words, I ſhall now apply myſelf to (what I chiefly intended) the drawing from thence thoſe ſeveral Uſeful *Obſervations* and *Improvements* with which it will furniſh us. And the

1. *Firſt*

1. *Firſt* Uſe I will make of it, ſhall be, to ſhew from thence, how great an Advantage the Chriſtian Religion hath, on this Account, over all other Religions, whether true or falſe! not excepting even the Diſpenſation of *Moſes*. SERM. I.

'Tis true, ſcarce any Religion ever ſet up in the World, without pretending, ſooner or later, to derive its Authority from Miracles. But then; either thoſe Miracles (as they are called) have been acted confeſſedly in Secret; or, if they are ſaid to have been done in Public, yet the Account, which was given of them, came too late to deſerve Credit, or to leave room for a Diſproof. And in *Both* theſe Caſes the Pretence to them is very ſuſpicious.

Thus, in the firſt Inſtance, *Numa's* Nightly Conferences with a Goddeſs, was a Figment, for which the People of *Rome* had His Word only; the Truth of the whole Tranſaction was reſolved into his ſingle Teſtimony. And ſuch was *Mahomet's* vain Boaſt of his receiving ſeveral Chapters of his *Alcoran* from the

SERM. I. the Angel *Gabriel*; for he wrought no *public* Miracle to enforce this *private* one; nor did he, that we can learn, pretend to the Power of working any. On the contrary, when Miracles were demanded of him, he at firſt (as his Followers have done ever ſince) appealed to the *Alcoran* itſelf, as to the greateſt and moſt convincing Miracle; which was written (he ſaid) in ſuch a manner, as to carry upon it the plain Stamp and Evidence of its own Divine Authority. And this was the only way in which he could make out his intercourſe with the Angel *Gabriel*.

Thus again, the ſeveral Idolatrous Religions in the *Eaſt* and *Weſt-Indies*, are ſaid to have received their Sanction from Miracles done by the firſt Authors and Founders of them: But then the Reporters of theſe Facts are ſo much later than the Facts themſelves, that 'tis impoſſible to have any Rational Aſſurance concerning the Reality of them: [Their *Mango-Copal*, *Amida*, *Brama*, and *Zaca* are ſuppoſed to have atchieved Wonders] at a time

time when there was no way of tranſmit- SERM.
ting Accounts of them to Poſterity, but I.
by Memory alone, and ſome thouſands of
Years before there could be any written
Monuments of them. Now this, I ſay,
is to build the Proof of Divine Truths
upon the *Certainty* of ſome Accounts,
whereof Men can *never be certain*; it is
to eſtabliſh the Belief of a Revelation upon
Things done, or ſaid to be done, *in a Corner*,
and which require a *new* Revelation to
make *them* Credible.

The *Jewiſh* Religion was indeed publiſhed by God in a very open and ſolemn Manner, before a whole Nation, with Thunders and Lightnings, and the Sound of Heavenly Trumpets, on the Top of Mount *Sinai*. Yet ſtill Infidelity finds room to object, that the Truth of this Revelation depends upon the Teſtimony of Friends only; and that the Scene of it is laid in a Place, where nobody *could* be preſent, but the Perſons concerned to ſupport the Account whether True or Falſe. And ſhould any of theſe Perſons have been inclined to contradict it, yet they

SERM. I. they could not; becauſe the whole Race of them periſhed in the Wilderneſs, ere a Correſpondence was as yet opened between them, and any Other People.

Such Objections, 'tis true, are of no Weight, laid in the Balance with the Evidence given for the Truth of thoſe Facts; yet it is ſome Advantage to the Proof of Goſpel Miracles, not to be liable even to theſe little Exceptions, and on no ſide to lie open to any Doubts or Suſpicions whatſoever. And from hence we may take Occaſion to conſider alſo in the

2. *Second* place, how inexcuſable They are, who, notwithſtanding that open, Inconteſtable manner in which the Divine Authority of the Goſpel was manifeſted, continue ſtill to ſtand out againſt it; to reſiſt and even to Deride the Utmoſt Efforts made by an Omnipotent Arm towards aſſerting the Miſſion of *Jeſus*; to parallel them with the Mock Wonders of Satan, and the Impoſtures of Falſe Prophets; and to inſinuate, as if they were all equally done by Colluſion.

ſion. Such was He, whoſe *Name* ought not to be mentioned without Reproach, and whom *therefore* I ſhall not mention; but his *Words* are theſe: "If we look "(ſays he) upon the Impoſtures wrought "by Confederacy, there is nothing, how "impoſſible ſoever to be done, that is "impoſſible to be believed. For Two "Men conſpiring, the one to ſeem Lame, "the other to cure him with a Charm, "will deceive Many; but Many con-"ſpiring, One to ſeem Lame, Another "to Cure him, and all the reſt to bear "Witneſs, will deceive more." Which was intended to ſuggeſt, that the Miraculous Cures recorded in the Goſpel, were not really *Cures*, but *Cheats*, and concerted between the ſeeming Objects and Authors of them; though the Relation of ſeveral of thoſe Cures be, as I ſhewed before, ſo circumſtanced, as to make this Account of them not only Ridiculous, but Impoſſible. He might as well have pretended to explain the Miracle of our Saviour's giving Eyes to the Blind, by reaſoning on the Medicinal Virtues of the Clay

SERM. I.

SERM. I. Clay and the Spittle employed on that Occaſion.

The Men who talk at this rate (as, I fear, many Men now do, and that Openly, and *not in a Corner)* who can bring themſelves thus to confound the plaineſt Marks of Truth and Falſhood, Reality and Impoſture; and to impute the moſt Clear and Demonſtrative Proofs that ever were given of a Divine Power, to Confederacy and a Juggle; ſuch Men, I ſay, are *inexcuſable* upon all the Accounts of right Reaſon and good Senſe; and *incurable* by all further Methods of Proof that can poſſibly be addreſſed to them. They are Infidels, not becauſe they want ſufficient Grounds of Conviction, but becauſe they reſolve not to be otherwiſe. To no purpoſe is it to diſpute with them about theſe *Foundations* of our Faith; to no purpoſe is it to Exhort, Beſeech, Perſuade, or Reprove them: *Their Eyes are ſhut, that they cannot ſee; and their Ears ſtopped, that they cannot hear; and their Hearts hard as the Nether Mill-ſtone.* Our Reaſonings of this kind may indeed be of

of ſome Uſe, in reſpect of *Thoſe*, who are yet untainted with the Principles of Infidelity; and may ſerve to keep ſuch free from the Infection: But, to ſuppoſe that any Good can be done by them upon *Thoſe*, who pretend to have weighed the Evidence of the Goſpel in a Balance, and to have found it light; is a Suppoſition, fit only for thoſe to make, who have not tried it. A SERM. I.

3. *Third* thing, which we learn from the Doctrine of the Text, is, to ſatisfy ourſelves of the Vanity of thoſe Pretences which are made to Miracles in the *Romiſh* Communion. The Members of it boaſt very much of mighty Signs and Wonders wrought by ſome Canonized, and ſome Uncanonized Saints; their Legends, their Sermons are full of them; even their great Advocate lays ſuch a Streſs upon the Number and Kinds of them, as to make the *Glory of Miracles* One of the fifteen *Notes*, by which that Church may be diſcerned to be the only true Church of *Chriſt*. But now, as Confidently, and *Publicly*, as they make theſe

SERM. I. theſe Boaſts of Miracles, we may obſerve, that the Miracles themſelves are ſaid to have been done very *Privately* in Religious Houſes, and Places of Secrecy and Retirement; in Remote Regions of the World, whither nobody will go to diſprove them; in ſuperſtitious Countries, where no Man hath a Mind, or Leave to examine them. And theſe are Circumſtances, which ſmell ſtrongly of Impoſture and Contrivance; for why ſhould Things deſigned for public Uſe and Influence, be thus tranſacted in the Dark, without Witneſſes? A *Miracle* is, in the Nature of it, ſomewhat done for the Converſion of Infidels; it is *a Sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not:* And yet it ſo happens, that Popiſh Miracles are generally done at *Home*, before Believers, where there is little or no Need of them, or Doubts concerning them: Or if *Abroad*, yet they are placed at ſuch a convenient Diſtance, as not to lie within reach of Confutation. In *China* and *Japan* theſe Wonder-workers may pretend to have done as many Miracles

1 Corin. xiv. 22.

cles as they pleaſe, without the Fear of a Diſcovery; in *Spain* and *Italy* they may venture, now and then, to ſet up for them, where there are ſo many always ready to favour their Pretences, and to run into any Pious Fraud that can be contrived for them. But in Heretical Countries (as they term Ours) they are very ſhy, and ſparing of their Talent this way; and ſtill, the more Hereſy there is in a Country, the fewer Miracles are heard of there. How can a Man chooſe but ſuſpect theſe Odd Stories, told under ſuch ſuſpicious Circumſtances? How can he be blamed for not entertaining them? For, as our Saviour's Brethren once reaſoned with him (and they Reaſoned right, though they Applied it wrong) ſo may we with One of theſe Pretenders to Miracles: *There is no Man doth any thing in Secret and He himſelf ſeeketh to be known openly; if Thou do theſe Things, ſhew thyſelf to the World.* And whoever *totally* declines this Trial, muſt not expect to have any Credit given, either to the Miracles he

SERM. I.

John vii. 4.

SERM. I. pretends to have done, or to the Meſſage he brings.

But the moſt abſurd Pretence of this kind, and the moſt oppoſite to the Doctrine delivered, is, that famous Miracle of the corporal Preſence in the Euchariſt; which is done ſo much in the dark, that nobody ever *did* or *can* ſee it, either *before*, or *after* it was done; or even *while* it is doing; no, not the Doer himſelf, as loudly as he may boaſt of it. The Miracles of the Goſpel are ſo many Appeals to the *Senſes* of Men; but this is a ſtrange *New* kind of Miracle, which is perfectly *inviſible*. To ſay, that it muſt be received by Faith, that we muſt *believe* it to be a Miracle; is to deſtroy the very End and Deſign of Miracles; which are Works done, in order to procure the Belief of ſomewhat elſe; and are not therefore themſelves to be believed, and taken for granted. In a word, it is a Miracle, the doing of which is ſo utterly a Secret, that it wants another Miracle to prove it to be one. And yet of all things in the World, it is the

the moſt incapable of being proved this way; for Miracles being, as I ſaid, Appeals to our Senſes, and Tranſubſtantiation a plain Contradiction to them; the Calling in of a Miracle to evince the Truth of this Doctrine would be (as One very juſtly reaſons) "to prove to a "Man by what he ſees, that he doth not "ſee what he ſees." Either therefore the pretended corporal Preſence is no Miracle; or, if it be one, we are ſtill Excuſable in not admitting it, ſince it comes to us in a way ſo very Singular, and demands our Aſſent againſt the Teſtimony of Senſe, upon the Reports of which all other Miracles are founded. Again, SERM. I.

4. *Fourthly*, the Doctrine diſcourſed of teaches us likewiſe to reject all Pretences to the Spirit, to private Viſions, and inward Illuminations, by which Enthuſiaſtical or deſigning Men endeavour to eſtabliſh their own particular Opinions, and to give them a ſacred Authority. *Should* theſe ſtrange things they tell us, be true; yet they are tranſacted *pri-*

SERM. I. *vately*, between God and their Own Souls, and cannot therefore reaſonably be made a Foundation for the Public Reception of any Doctrine, or Opinion: [For whenever God intends to eſtabliſh any thing openly, he gives Open Proof and Evidence of it; his Notice reaches always as far as he deſigns to extend his Revelation; and They therefore, who have no Sure Sign or Notice, that a Truth is revealed, cannot, in reaſon, be obliged to entertain it. Thus it would be, I ſay, ſuppoſing theſe Viſions, and Revelations alledged, were really *true*; whereas we have indeed the beſt ground in the World for ſuſpecting them to be *falſe*;] ſince it is evidently contrary to all the Divine Methods of acting, with which we are acquainted, that God ſhould give a Man a Commiſſion to publiſh a new Doctrine, and not give him wherewithal to manifeſt the Authority of his Commiſſion to Others. *If I bear witneſs of myſelf, my Witneſs is not true*, ſays our Saviour; it is probably *not* true in itſelf, it is certainly not neceſſa-

John ii. 31.

ry

ry to be embraced *as* true, by thoſe to whom I propoſe it; and therefore it follows, *The Works that I do, they bear witneſs of Me, that the Father hath ſent me.* The Miracles which a Man performs, are the only convincing Arguments of his being inſpired; and his Own Affirmation in this Caſe, when diveſted of theſe Proofs, let it be never ſo Peremptory, cannot reaſonably induce a Belief of what he affirms. SERM. I. Ver. 36.

Thus (for inſtance) when the Diſpute was in the Church of *Rome* between the Two Orders of *Franciſcans* and *Dominicans*, about the Immaculate Conception; One Side had Viſions and Revelations *for* it, and the Other Side had Viſions and Revelations *againſt* it; but Neither Side thought themſelves obliged to take the Word of the Other; and the reſt of the World, that ſtood by, did not think themſelves obliged to take the Word of Either; but believed, or diſbelieved the Immaculate Conception, according as Reaſon, Scripture, and the Authority of Tradition ſeemed to determine them,

SERM. I. and not according to the Proportion of Viſions and Revelations, vouched *for*, or *againſt* it.

5. It will be yet a *Fifth* Improvement of what hath been laid down, to Obſerve from hence, how it comes to paſs, that Miracles have been ſo long diſcontinued, and do rarely, very rarely, appear in theſe Latter Ages of the World. They were performed at firſt in ſo Conſpicuous, Exuberant, and Convincing a Manner, as to render a continual Repetition of the ſame Proofs utterly needleſs. Had indeed theſe *firſt* Evidences of a Divine Power been diſplayed before a *Few* only, or before *Many*, but *Suſpected* Witneſſes, it might have been requiſite perhaps to repeat them often in ſucceeding Times; (as often perhaps as any ſingle Convert to Chriſtianity was to be made:) But being originally wrought, as you have heard, in the Face of the Sun, before a whole Nation of Witneſſes, and thoſe Witneſſes Enemies; the Certainty of them was ſo well eſtabliſhed, and tranſmitted to After-Ages; as that no Fair,

Fair, Impartial Conſiderer ſhould be able to doubt of it; and ſuch an one, having no Reaſon to diſpute the Truth of *Former* Miracles, could have no Reaſon, no Occaſion to demand *New* ones. God governs the *Moral* World, as he doth the *Natural.* He made it indeed and ordered it, at firſt, by Miracle; but he ſteers and conducts the Affairs of it ever ſince, by ſtanding Rules and Laws, and by the Ordinary Miniſtry of Second Cauſes. And thus he eſtabliſhed the Truth of his Revelation, at the Beginning, by Miracle; But, that being once done, he ſuffers things now to go on in their Regular Courſe without offering every Day Motives of the ſame Kind to Men, but appealing to thoſe which he hath propoſed already; which he knows to be ſufficient, and knows alſo, that if they do not ſuffice, no others will; according to that Remarkable Deciſion of our Lord's, That ſuch as *hear not Moſes and the Prophets* (i. e. reject a Revelation already well atteſted by Miracles) *would not be* SERM. I.

Luke xvi. 31.

SERM. I. *perſuaded, though one aroſe from the Dead.*

Further,

6. *Sixthly*, from the *General* Drift and Tenor, of the Argument we have been handling, it may be juſtly collected, that the more any Doctrine affects *Secrecy*, and declines Trials of any Sort, the more Reaſon we have to Suſpect, and to Examine it: *Beloved, believe not every Spirit* (ſays St. *John*) *but try the Spirits, whether they be of God*; and moſt particularly, thoſe Spirits, which deſire to be believed without being tried: For this looks, as if they were afraid of being brought to the Teſt, and *Fear* generally ariſes from a Conſciouſneſs of Guilt, as the ſame Apoſtle, in this very Caſe, argues: *Every one* (ſays he) *that doth Evil, hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, leſt his Deeds ſhould be reproved; but he that doth the Truth, cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifeſt, that they are wrought in God.*

1 John iv. 1.

John iii. 20, 21.

This Reflexion cannot but once again put us in mind of thoſe Articles of the *Roman* Catholic Faith, by which it ſtands diſtin-

diſtinguiſhed from the Faith of all other Chriſtians. We are not allowed to doubt of them, or to reaſon upon them. They are to be received implicitly, without any particular Diſcuſſion and Enquiry: From the great Doctrine of Infallibility they proceed, and into that they are finally reſolved: *As the Rivers run into the Sea, into the Place from whence the Rivers come, thither do they return again:* And how can That which hath the Stamp of unerring Authority upon it, become the proper Subject of any Man's private Debates and Reaſonings? Now this is the greateſt Prejudice imaginable againſt the Truth of the Doctrines of any Church, or the Sincerity of its Pretences: For if what it propoſeth to us, be True and Reaſonable, why ſhould it decline the Examination and Judgment of Reaſon? If all be pure Gold, without Alloy, how comes it thus to fly the Touchſtone? 'Tis the Property of Error only to ſculk and hide its Head; but Truth, we know, is open and barefaced; like our firſt Parents, in the State of Innocence and Happineſs, *Naked,*

SERM. I.

Eccleſ. i. 7.

SERM. I. *Naked, but not aſhamed.* And therefore, though it be very unreaſonable in the Church of *Rome* to impoſe her Doctrines upon us, without allowing us to examine them; yet it is not unreaſonable in Us to reject theſe Doctrines, thus propoſed, even without Examination.

The ſame may be ſaid of thoſe Wild Opinions ſet up by Fanaticks and Enthuſiaſts, as Dictates of the Spirit, and which they will ſuffer to be tried by the Spirit only; not by the dead Letter of Scripture, or by Carnal Reaſoning. There needs no more than this very Conſideration, to convince us of the Abſurdity of their Pretences; for if *Scripture* and *Reaſon* were *for them*, They would not be *againſt Scripture* and *Reaſon*: Men do not uſe to decline the Arbitration of their Friends.

Far different from this is the Conduct of that excellent Church, to which we belong. She deals openly and fairly, brings all her Doctrines to the Light, and invites all her Members to ſearch and enquire into them. She deſires nothing more,

more, than to be tried at the Bar of *unbiaſſed* Reaſon, and to be concluded by its Sentence: *She knows, that her Teſtimony is true*, and that the Truth of it will appear the more, the more it is ſifted. Even in thoſe Myſteries, which She propoſes as Objects of Faith, divinely revealed, She pretends not to ſhut out the Uſe of Reaſon, but only cautions us to exerciſe it Soberly and Diſcreetly, and to keep it within its due Bounds: Not to reject a Divine Truth, becauſe we are ignorant of the particular *Manner* in which it may be made out; Not to reaſon from the Properties of Finite to thoſe of Infinite Beings; Not to pretend to find Contradictions in Points, the Depth of which we cannot Fathom or Comprehend. Under theſe Reſtraints, She encourages us to uſe our Reaſon, in the Diſcuſſion of Myſteries, as freely as we pleaſe; and She queſtions not, but that the more freely we uſe it, the more Reaſon we ſhall find to believe thoſe Myſteries, and to revere them. SERM. I.

Would

SERM. I. Would to God, All Men dealt as fairly with Her, as She deals with all Men! She would not *then*, by Ill Tongues and Pens, be traduced, as guilty of Pious Cheats and Prieſtcraft; Things, which She deteſts utterly, and hath done more toward Expoſing them, where they are practiſed, than any of Thoſe who make the Loudeſt Noiſe with them. She would not *then* have thoſe Accuſations of Impoſture and Deſign, laid at her Door, which She herſelf hath ſo often and juſtly charged on the Church of *Rome*; Accuſations ſtolen, by Her Adverſaries, from Her matchleſs Writings againſt that Church, and applied to Her, without Ground or Colour, without Senſe or Reaſon. But our Comfort is, That our Caſe, in this reſpect, is like that of good *David*, when he appealed to God, and ſaid, *The Reproaches of Them that Reproached Thee are fallen upon Me.* Theſe Enemies of our Church are equally Enemies of all other Churches, and all Religions; only Ours happens to be the faireſt Mark, becauſe it is Uppermoſt; for were any other

Pſal. lxix. 9.

ſet

ſet up in the room of it, ſtill the ſame Cry of Holy Frauds and Prieſtcraft would be heard againſt *that* alſo from the Mouths of Profligate Perſons, in Licentious Times. To cut off all Occaſion, as much as can be, from thoſe who ſeek Occaſion, let us be ſure, all of Us, who are Members of this Excellent Church; Let us be ſure, I ſay, which is SERM. I.

7. The *Laſt* thing I have to recommend to you from the Text, to make our Practice of the Goſpel, like the firſt Proofs of it, Conſpicuous and Plain; and endeavour, with all our Power, to recommend the Doctrine we embrace, to the *Hearts* of Men, as Openly, and Powerfully by our good Lives and Actions, as the firſt Planters of it did, by their Miraculous Performances. So ſhall we beſt put to Silence the Ignorance of Fooliſh Men; and be able, in the moſt convincing, and effectual manner, to make an Anſwer to our Blaſphemers.

The *Profeſſion* of the true and pure doctrine of *Chriſt*, and a *Practice* ſuitable to that Profeſſion, are both often, in the *New Teſtament*,

SERM. I. *Teſtament*, compared to *Light*. Like *That*, they diſplay their bright Beams, and diffuſe their quickening Influence; Enlightening and Enlivening all that is near, and far off; Diſſipating the Miſts of Vice and Ignorance, and Diſcovering the Hidden things of Darkneſs. As to our *Profeſſion* of the pure Doctrine of the Goſpel, that it ſufficiently reſembles Light, is manifeſt and notorious: Let us reſemble it alſo in as illuſtrious and diſtinguiſhing a *Practice*, and by *walking worthy*, every way, *of that Vocation wherewith we are called*. Let us reſolve to be (as I truſt we are) the Pureſt Church upon Earth, for our *Manners*, as well as for our *Doctrine*; in One reſpect as well as the Other, *a Light placed on a Candleſtick, and not under a Buſhel; a City ſet upon an Hill, that cannot be hid.* In a word, *Let Our Light ſo ſhine before Men, that They, ſeeing our good Works, may glorify our Father which is in Heaven.*

Epheſ. iv. 1.

Matth. v. 14, &c.

The

The Baptiſt's *Meſſage to* Jeſus, *and* Jeſus's *Anſwer explained.*

A

SERMON

Preached at the

ROLLS,

December 24, 1710.

MATTH. xi. 3.

Art Thou He that ſhould come? or do we look for another?

AT this time of *Advent*, particularly dedicated by the Church to a Devout Commemoration of our Saviour's Coming in the Fleſh, and ſet apart to prepare

SERM. II.

SERM. II. pare us for a worthy Celebration of the approaching Feaſt of his Nativity; it may be no Unſuitable Entertainment to your Thoughts, to ſuggeſt to you ſome Reflexions on this Paſſage of Scripture, and thoſe others which introduce, accompany, and explain it.

When John *had heard in Priſon* (ſays the Evangeliſt) *the Works of* Chriſt, *he ſent Two of his Diſciples, and ſaid unto him, Art thou He that ſhould come? or do we look for another?* That is, Art Thou the Meſſiah, the great Redeemer of *Iſrael*, whoſe Coming was foretold by the Prophets, and is now expected with great Impatience by the whole Body of the *Jews*, and before whom I am ſent, as his Forerunner and Harbinger? Jeſus *anſwered, and ſaid unto them, Go, and ſhew* John *again thoſe things which ye do hear and ſee. The Blind receive their Sight, the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleanſed, and the Deaf hear, the Dead are raiſed up, and the Poor have the Goſpel preached unto them. And Bleſſed is he, whoſoever ſhall not be offended in Me!* As if he had

ſaid, "Judge Ye yourſelves, by the Works SERM.
"which I now perform, whether I am II.
"the Meſſiah or not, or what Reaſon
"there can be to doubt of my Divine
"Miſſion and Authority."

This Tranſaction is extremely remarkable, and will afford much uſeful Matter to our Reflexions, in relation both to the *Enquiry* made by the *Baptiſt*, and the *Anſwer* returned by our Lord to that Enquiry.

And *Firſt*, as to the *Enquiry* itſelf, it I.
may be matter of juſt Surprize to us, that the *Baptiſt* ſhould, ſo long after he had continued diſcharging the office of *Chriſt's* Harbinger, put ſuch a Queſtion as this to our Saviour, *Art Thou He that ſhould come? or do we look for another?* For could *John* be Ignorant of our Saviour's Character? Could he entertain the leaſt Doubt of it? He, who had formerly Baptized *Chriſt*, had ſeen the Spirit deſcend on him in the Form of a Dove, and heard the Voice from Heaven thus teſtifying concerning him, *This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well*

SERM. II. *pleaſed? He*, who had borne Record of our Lord more than once, that he was *the Son of God, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the Sins of the World?* Could *He* poſſibly afterwards be under any Degree of Heſitancy or Doubt, in relation to our Saviour's Character? Certainly he could not; and therefore we muſt look out for ſome other Reaſon of his ſending this Meſſage, beſides the Deſire of ſatisfying himſelf; and that plainly was the procuring Satisfaction to thoſe by whom the Meſſage was ſent, his Diſciples and Followers, who, notwithſtanding all the Aſſeverations of *John* to this purpoſe, continued ſtill Incredulous;—We may ſuppoſe, for theſe Reaſons:

Joh. i. 34. Ver. 29.

1. Becauſe they ſaw their Maſter impriſoned, and now likely to be put to Death, for preaching up the Kingdom of God, and the Coming of the Meſſiah; and could not apprehend, that, had *Jeſus* been that Meſſiah, he ſhould have wanted Power, or Will to employ that Power for the *Baptiſt's* Deliverance. And yet ſo far was this from being the Caſe,

Caſe, that our Saviour doth not appear once to have made an honorable Mention of *John*, till after the Diſciples, who came upon this Errand, had left him. *Then* indeed, and not *before*, the Evangeliſt tells us, Jeſus *began to ſay unto the Multitudes, What went ye out into the Wilderneſs to ſee?* and to take that Occaſion of enlarging on the *Baptiſt's* Character, and the Dignity of his Office. SERM. II. Matt. ix. 7.

2. They might have obſerved, that our Saviour had not himſelf hitherto aſſerted his Right to that Title, but declined all Occaſions that had been given him, of directly and openly owning himſelf to be the Meſſiah; which Conduct, though neceſſary, in order to carry on, and complete his Miniſtry, without Interruption from the *Roman* Powers, was yet what the Diſciples of *John*, who had heard their Maſter preaching up the Kingdom of the Meſſiah without any Diſguiſe, could not underſtand; nor account for any otherwiſe, than by ſuppoſing that *Jeſus* arrogated not that Honour to himſelf, as being conſcious, that it did

SERM. II.

not belong to him. And theſe Suſpicions might be raiſed, by their obſerving

3. The manner of our Saviour's Life and Converſation, which was ſo very different from that of their Maſter's, and had ſo much leſs an outward Appearance of Sanctity in it. The *One came neither Eating nor Drinking*, delighted in Solitude, and lived in the Practice of the higheſt Rigours and Auſterities; The Other *came Eating and Drinking*, lived in the World, and according to all the innocent Cuſtoms of it; converſing freely and promiſcuouſly with all Sorts of Men, even with Publicans and Sinners. And therefore they were tempted to think, that He, who was ſo far beneath their Maſter in what *they* called Perfection and Holineſs, could not be ſo far above him in his Character and Office, as, if he were the Meſſiah, he muſt have been.

Matt. xi. 18.

Theſe Doubts, it is probable, that *John* had very often endeavoured to remove: But finding that they ſtill ſtuck with his Followers, he took the laſt and beſt

beſt way of ſatisfying them, by ſending them on this Meſſage to *Jeſus* himſelf, and giving them, by that means, an Opportunity of being Eye and Ear Witneſſes of his Works, and of his Doctrine, which, he knew, would effectually convince them. SERM. II.

Thus much concerning the *Enquiry*: We are now to conſider,

Secondly, The *Reply* which our Saviour made to it. In which Reply there are Two Things obſervable; the *Manner*, and the *Matter* of it. II.

As to the *Manner* of it, we ſee, it is not *Direct* and *Poſitive*; but ſo ordered only, as to give them an Occaſion of anſwering that Queſtion themſelves, which they had propoſed to our bleſſed Saviour. This Method, as it was agreeable to his Conduct in Other Caſes, and requiſite to ſecure him from the Accuſations of thoſe who watched his Words, whenever he taught in publick, ſo had it this further Uſe in it; that it imprinted a Conviction on the Enquirers, after the

SERM. II. moſt gentle, reaſonable, and winning way, without commanding and exporting their Aſſent by an Authoritative Declaration of the Truth, which he thus invited them to receive. The Proper Motives and Evidences only were laid before them; and they afterwards were left to frame the Concluſion from thence; that ſo their Faith, which was to entitle them to ſuch Glorious Privileges, might be a Free and Voluntary Act, and the Teſt of an Ingenuous and Well-diſpoſed Mind.

As to the *Matter* of our Saviour's Anſwer, *Three* things there are which deſerve to be weighed by us:---The remarkable *Gradation* and *Riſe* there is in the Particulars there mentioned: The *Appoſiteneſs* of it in relation to the Enquirers: And the *General* Force and Evidence of the Argument contained in it.

1. To begin with the firſt of theſe: *Go and ſhew* John *again*, ſays our Saviour, *thoſe things which Ye do hear and ſee*; and then he particularly mentions the Bodily

Bodily Cures he wrought on the Deaf and Blind, the Lame and the Lepers. He adds beyond this a yet plainer Inſtance of a Miraculous and Divine Power,--- *the Dead are raiſed up*; and he ſeems to advance ſtill ſomewhat further, when he ſays, that even *the Poor have the Goſpel preached unto them.* An Inſtance of Goodneſs and Condeſcenſion, with which the *Jews* had before been but little acquainted! The Prophets of that Nation had been ſent always to great and mighty Perſons to reclaim their Princes and Rulers, and to reprove Exemplary Wickedneſs in high Places; and, to manifeſt the Authority of their Commiſſion to them, were ſometimes armed with the Power of Miracles. But nothing could be more wonderful, than to ſee a Prophet in *Jewry* preaching to the Poor and Meek; addreſſing himſelf to the Loweſt and Meaneſt of Men; exhorting them to Virtue, removing their Prejudices, and rectifying their Errors! Such Applications amidſt that People were ſo unuſual, and exceeding rare, that our

SERM. II.

SERM. II. Saviour thought fit to conclude the Enumeration of the ſeveral Proofs of his Miſſion with theſe two Particulars, *The Dead are raiſed up*, ſays he, *and the Poor have the Goſpel preached unto them.*

2. The *Appoſitenes* of our Saviour's Anſwer, in relation to the Perſons who made the Enquiry, is what we are next to conſider. And here

Firſt, we may obſerve, what a *Natural* Occaſion he takes of reſolving their Doubts, from what he was even then ſaying and doing in their Preſence, *Go, and ſhew* John *again, thoſe things which Ye do hear and ſee:* That is, you come to learn of Me, whether I am the Meſſiah: Your Maſter hath often told you, that I am; but ye will not believe him. To *Him* you ſhould have given Ear, who is my profeſſed Harbinger and Herald; to *Me* it belongs not ſo properly to proclaim my own Titles, and aſſert my own Authority. For Joh. v. 31. *if I bear Witneſs of myſelf, my Witneſs is not true.* It is liable to Suſpicion, and likely to be of little Weight and Authority

rity with You. If Ye ſuſpect your *Ma-* SERM.
ſter's Teſtimony of me, much more will II.
ye ſuſpect that which I give of myſelf.
Behold therefore the Teſtimony of God!
for *the Works which I do* (which ye now Joh. v. 36.
ſee done before your Eyes, they) *bear Witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me.* If ye ſtill doubt, who I am, why aſk ye Me? aſk the Works, which you cannot doubt whether I do, or not; and they ſhall tell you.

Secondly, Nothing could be better contrived to ſatisfy theſe Enquirers, of our Saviour's Preeminence over the *Baptiſt*, than theſe Wonders which they ſaw him perform, and heard him now appeal to; ſince they knew very well, that their Maſter had not the Gift of Miracles, nor pretended to the Power of doing them; and could not therefore but ſee, that his Miniſtry was inferior to that of *Chriſt*, and ſubordinate to it; eſpecially ſince from the *Baptiſt's* own Mouth they had learnt, that the *doing of Miracles* ſhould be *one* illuſtrious and diſcriminating Mark of the Meſſiah; for ſo much, I think,

SERM. II. that Paſſage in the Goſpel of St. *John*. ſufficiently implies,—*Many who reſorted unto* Jeſus, *ſaid*, John *did no Miracles*; Joh. x. 41. *but all things which* John *ſpake of this Man, were true*; that is, though he did none himſelf, yet he propheſied that *Jeſus* ſhould do them; and when his Diſciples therefore ſaw that Prediction fulfilled, they were able themſelves to anſwer their Own Queſtion.—*Art Thou He that ſhould come? or do we look for Another?* Further,

Thirdly, The *Particular Facts*, which our Saviour here mentions, in order to inſinuate his Preeminence over the *Baptiſt*, are extremely well ſuited to that Purpoſe. They are all Acts of Beneficence and Kindneſs, wrought for the Service and Benefit of Men, either for the Inſtruction of their Minds, or the Healing of their Bodies. And this, he tacitly ſuggeſts to them, was a far nobler Employment, and carried in it a much greater Degree of Perfection and Uſe, than the Solitary Life and Rigid Auſterities of the *Baptiſt*, for which his Diſciples

ciples held him in ſuch high Veneration. SERM. He hints to them the Reaſons, for which II. he lived and converſed thus publickly and familiarly, and applied himſelf to Men in the moſt Humane, Eaſy, and Affable Manner, without diſtinguiſhing himſelf from Others by any rough and frightening Appearances, any thing Extraordinary and Singular, either in his Look, Attire, or Behaviour (for which the *Baptiſt* was remarkable) and he leaves them (even in *this* reſpect) to conſider, whether his Character was not ſuperior to that of their Maſter, and his Adminiſtration ordained to more Excellent Purpoſes; and therefore he concludes his Reply with Words, which have an Eye to thoſe Prejudices they had entertained againſt him on this Account; *Bleſſed are They, who are not offended in Me!*

Beyond all this, it is, in the

Fourth place, extremely remarkable, that the Anſwer of our Lord to theſe Enquiring Diſciples is expreſſed in Words taken from a Prophecy of *Iſaiah* concerning the Meſſiah. And *Iſaiah* was,

SERM. II. was, of all the Prophets, *He*, in whoſe Writings the *Baptiſt's* Followers were the moſt converſant, and for whom they had the greateſt Eſteem and Reverence; inaſmuch as their Maſter was there more particularly pointed out, the Perſon and Office of this Cryer in the Wilderneſs was there more exactly deſcribed, than in any other Part of the ſacred Volume. And therefore what *this* Prophet teſtified concerning the Meſſiah, was beſt ſuited to work thoſe into a Reception of him, who had been led by his Teſtimony to diſcern even their Maſter himſelf, and to become his Followers.

Now the Places here referred to in *Iſaiah*, are theſe, *chap.* lxi. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe the Lord hath appointed me to preach good Tidings to the Meek.* Εὐαγγελίσασθαι τοῖς πτωχοῖς, as it is in the Tranſlation of the Septuagint; and the very ſame Phraſe is employed here in the Text, πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται, *The Poor have the Goſpel preached unto them.* The reſt of the Particulars may be almoſt entirely ſupplied from another

other Paſſage in the xxxv^th^ of the ſame Prophet, ver. 4, 5, 6. *Behold, your God will come with Vengeance, even God with a Recompence; he will come and ſave you. Then the Eyes of the Blind ſhall be opened, and the Ears of the Deaf ſhall be unſtopped: Then ſhall the lame Man leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb ſhall ſing.* SERM. II.

It is very probable that the *Baptiſt* himſelf might have an Eye to this Paſſage, when he ſent his doubting Diſciples with this Queſtion to our Saviour, *Art thou he that ſhould come?* Since we find there a Promiſe, within the Compaſs of a few Words, twice repeated, that God *would come, would come* to ſave his People; and therefore our Saviour, very appoſitely ſent them back again to the ſame Prophet in his Reply, and taught them by that means to underſtand the true Drift and Meaning of their Maſter's Queſtion. It is as if he had ſaid, You believe not the *Baptiſt's* Teſtimony, that I am *He who ſhould come*; yet ſurely *Iſaiah*, upon whoſe Authority ye have received the

SERM. II. the *Baptiſt* himſelf, will find Credit with you; and *He* hath thus propheſied of me.

Every way, we ſee the Anſwer of our Bleſſed Redeemer was ſo wiſely and graciouſly contrived, as to meet with all the Prejudices, and diſpel all the Doubts of theſe Enquirers, and to lead them into an Acknowledgment that they had found the Meſſiah whom they ſought, *Him who was to come*, and were no longer to *look for another*.

3. Nay, theſe Words carry in them (as I in the Third place obſerved) an Argument of more general Uſe and Influence, and propoſe to us all the Chief Marks and Characters of ſuch Miracles, as are ſufficient to confirm the Authority of any Perſon pretending to be ſent by God; and all of which concurred in the Miracles done by our Meſſiah; as any unprejudiced Perſon, who compares them together, may eaſily perceive. I ſhall but juſt mention them as they are hinted to us in the Words of our Saviour's Reply, and leave the further Conſideration of them

them to your private Meditations. Now the SERM. II.

1. Mark and Character of ſuch a Miracle, as can be the proper Evidence of a Divine Miſſion, is, that it be above the Known Powers of all Natural Cauſes: And ſuch were all the Inſtantaneous Cures here mentioned; and particularly the raiſing Men from the Dead.

2. A Second Character is, that they be done publickly and in the Face of the World, that there may be no room to ſuſpect Artifice and Colluſion. And ſuch were the Wonders to which our Lord appealed. ---- *Go tell* John *again*, ſays he, *thoſe Things which ye do hear and ſee*; which are done here before your Eyes, and in the midſt of a Great Multitude.

3. A third Thing requiſite is, that the Doctrine which they are brought to vouch be every way worthy of God, and fit thus to be Sealed and Atteſted by him. The *Goſpel is preached*, ſays our Lord; the moſt perfect Scheme of Morality that ever Mankind was acquainted with.

4. It

SERM. II.

4. It is yet a further Recommendation of ſuch Miracles, If they carry in them Marks not only of an Aſtoniſhing Power, but of Good Will alſo, and Beneficence to Men; as the Healing of the Blind, the Lepers, and the Lame, here in the Text, manifeſtly did.

5. If the very doing of them was foretold, and the Time and Perſon declared by the Spirit of Prophecy; for ſo I have ſhewn that our Saviour, in his Account of the mighty Works here done, referred himſelf to the Predictions of *Iſaiah*.

6. If there be no Appearances of Self-intereſt and Deſign in the Worker of ſuch Miracles; and this Objection our Lord alſo removes, where he ſays, that the *Poor had the Goſpel preached unto them*; the *Poor*, to whom no Man would apply, who propoſed to himſelf Temporal Views and Aims, which *They* (alas!) could no ways forward.

Thus have I endeavoured to open to you, very largely, the Significancy of each Word in this Important Paſſage;

and

and particularly the wonderful Addreſs of our Lord, in applying himſelf to thoſe who reſorted to him for Inſtruction, and in reaſoning them into Conviction by Arguments and Suggeſtions peculiarly accommodated to the Notions and Apprehenſions they were under. —— Our Chief Buſineſs indeed, from ſuch Places as theſe, is, to inculcate into the Minds of *Chriſtians* the *Practical* Leſſons of Piety contained in the Goſpel; to convince them of the Reaſonableneſs, Beauty, and Uſefulneſs of thoſe Precepts; and to inflame them with ardent Deſires of excelling therein. However, ſuch *Speculative* Enquiries as theſe have alſo their Uſe, and may ſometimes deſerve a Place in your Minds; as contributing to raiſe your Attention in peruſing the ſeveral Parts of Holy Writ, and to improve and quicken you in your Manner of meditating upon them; and as aſſiſting you towards a Diſcovery of thoſe Ineſtimable Treaſures of Divine Wiſdom, which are hidden in that Sacred Volume. We generally, I fear, con-

SERM. II.

SERM. II. conſult the Scriptures too negligently, and reflect on them too ſuperficially, with no greater Degree of Attention and Care, than we employ in peruſing mere Human Compoſures (and I would to God we employed always as much in the One Caſe as in the Other!) We do not ſufficiently conſider, *Who* it is that ſpeaks to us there, nor *What* it is that he ſays: What Weight, What Fulneſs of Senſe, What Excellent Variety of Matter, and Wonderful Depth of Thought there muſt needs be in Words dictated by, or at leaſt ſpoken under, the overruling Influence of Infinite Wiſdom. And therefore, though the Scriptures are read every Day in our Churches (and ſometimes perhaps conſulted in our Cloſets) yet we make but ſlow Proficiency towards a True Taſte, and a Clear Diſcernment of thoſe high Truths which are contained in them. We dwell on the Letter only, on what offers itſelf to us at the firſt View; but we do not make ourſelves acquainted with the Life and Spirit of them. And yet for this Reaſon,

ſon, among Others, theſe Holy Writ- SERM.
ings were left us by God, that we might, II.
as good *David* ſpeaks, *exerciſe ourſelves in them Day and Night*, have perpetual Matter for our Enquiries into, and Improvements in, the Knowledge of things Divine, and drink always of theſe Waters of Life, without either allaying our Thirſt, or exhauſting the Spring from whence they flow.

The Difference between the Holy Scriptures, and other Writings, is much the ſame, as that between the Works of Art and Nature. The Works of Art appear to moſt Advantage at firſt; but will not bear a Nice and Repeated Examination: The more curiouſly we pry into them, the leſs we ſhall admire them. But the Works of Nature will bear a thouſand Views, and Reviews, and yet ſtill be Inſtructive, and ſtill Wonderful. In like manner the Writings of mere Men, though never ſo excellent in their Kind, yet ſtrike and ſurprize us moſt upon our firſt Peruſal of them; and then flatten upon our Taſte by de-

SERM. II. grees, as our Familiarity with them increaſes. Whereas the Word of Revelation is like its Author, of an Endleſs and Unſearchable Perfection; and the more we look into it, and revolve it in our Minds, the more Reaſon ſtill ſhall we find to admire and adore the Wiſdom of the Great Revealer of it.

I have therefore hinted to you ſome Thoughts concerning the Drift of our Saviour's Reaſoning, and the peculiar Appoſiteneſs of it in relation to the Perſons who made the Enquiry in the Text; that I might excite you from thence to meditate in like manner on the Other Parts of the Book of God, which are

2 Tim. iii. 15. equally *profitable for Doctrine, and able to make us Wiſe unto Salvation, through Faith which is in* Chriſt Jeſus.

Wherefore, *ſearch the Scriptures*, for as *in Them ye have Eternal Life*, ſo have ye room alſo for an Eternal Growth and Improvement in that Knowledge, which leads to it; in that Knowledge, which we can here attain unto in Part only, but ſhall hereafter, when the Veil of this Fleſh

Fleſh is done away, more perfectly com- SERM.
prehend; and the more earneſtly we aſpire II.
after it, and labour for it in this State of
Imperfection, the more Exalted a Degree
of it ſhall we poſſeſs in Another World.
And do Thou, "Bleſſed Lord, who haſt
"cauſed All Holy Scriptures to be written
"for our Inſtruction, grant that we may
"in ſuch wiſe read, mark, learn, and in-
"wardly digeſt them, that by Patience
"and Comfort of thy Holy Word we may
"embrace and ever hold faſt the bleſſed
"Hope of Everlaſting Life, which thou
"haſt given us in our Saviour *Jeſus*
"*Chriſt.*"

A

SERMON

ON THE

Incarnation of our Lord.

Preached at the

ROLLS,

On *Chriſtmas-Day*, 1710.

MATTH. xi. 6.

Bleſſed is He whoſoever ſhall not be offended in Me.

AND can any Man then be offend- SERM.
ed in Thee, bleſſed *Jeſu!* Who III.
haſt undertaken, and done, and ſuffered
ſo much for all Men! Who willingly

SERM. III. emptiedſt thyſelf of all thy Glory, leſteſt Heaven and the Boſom of thy Father, for our Sakes; and, when thou tookeſt upon thee to deliver Man, didſt not (as at this time) abhor the Virgin's Womb! Can a Deſign of ſo much Goodneſs ever miſcarry by the Folly of thoſe, on whoſe very Account it was undertaken! Can ſuch a Meſſage of Love (of a Love aſtoniſhing and infinite) be rejected!— Canſt Thou thyſelf, the great Meſſenger, be received any otherwiſe, than with the open Arms and Hearts of all thy Creatures, for whoſe Redemption thou wert thus made Fleſh, and dweltſt among Us!— Is it poſſible for any *One* of them to be any ways offended in Thee!

Yet ſo it is, Bleſſed Lord! that from thy firſt Coming in the Fleſh to this time, there have been unreaſonable Men all along, that have taken Offence at Thee! —And there will not fail to be ſuch within the Pale of Chriſtianity itſelf, even till thy ſecond Coming to judge the World. —Thy Doctrines have been complained of, as laying too great a Reſtraint on Human

man Nature, as hard and unpracticable Sayings! — Thy Myſteries have been doubted of, diſputed againſt, and ridiculed by Men of perverſe and proud Minds, who are reſolved to believe nothing farther than they can thoroughly and clearly comprehend it!—Thy Perſon itſelf, the Circumſtances and Way of thy Coming have been an Offence unto Many!—*To the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Fooliſhneſs!* A conſtant Occaſion of Falling to all Godleſs and Sinful Men, whoſe high Minds are not brought into Captivity to the Obedience of Faith, nor made fit for the Reception of the Truth, as it is in *Jeſus!*—But bleſſed are all they (have thy Holy Lips pronounced) who, in none of theſe Ways, are offended in Thee! SERM. III. 1 Cor. i. 23.

As to the two former Ways of being offended in *Chriſt*, on the Account of the Difficulty of practiſing thoſe Duties he has enjoined, and believing thoſe Articles of Faith he hath propoſed, I ſhall not at preſent enter into the Conſideration of them. The Feſtival we are now celebrating, determines

SERM. III. termines me rather to point my Reflexions on the Offence which has been taken at the *Perſon* of Chriſt, the *Method*, and *Manner* of his Coming amongſt Us.— The Objections of which Kind I ſhall briefly propoſe, and anſwer; that ſo having rooted and grounded ourſelves in a firm Belief of the Doctrine, we may, with the more Aſſurance, make thoſe ſeveral Improvements of it, which will be profitable unto Godlineſs.

It hath formerly by *Porphyry* and *Celſus*, and ever ſince by their Succeſſors, the open or hidden Enemies of Chriſtianity, been thus argued:

That the Doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God is *Unreaſonable* and *Incredible*; inconſiſtent with the clear Notions we have of the unlimited Perfections of God, and the finite Properties of Man; between which there is ſo Wide and Eternal a Difference, as ſeems to render them incapable of being joined together in one and the ſame Perſon or Subject. For how can Wiſdom, Perfection, and Happineſs itſelf be mixed with

with Folly, Infirmity, and Miſery? What Union can there be between what is Finite, and that which is Infinite? SERM. III.

But were it conceivable, how the Divine and Human Nature could be United into *One Perſon*; yet is it not (ſay they) *reaſonable* to believe that ſuch a *Method was* actually taken? For ſurely there were *other* ways, beſides this, of Reſtoring lapſed Man to the Favour of God, and that Happineſs which he had forfeited, and of taking away the Sins of the World: The unlimited Mercy of the Divine Nature was of itſelf ſufficient to compaſs this End, and forgive this Debt, without requiring any Ranſom; and unleſs a *God Incarnate* were *abſolutely and indiſpenſably* requiſite to free mankind from the Guilt and Dominion of their Sins, it is no ways reaſonable to think, that Recourſe was had to ſo extraordinary a Remedy.

Now, as to the firſt Part of the Objection, the *impoſſibility* of an Union between God and Man in the ſame Perſon or Subject, 'tis a bold, and a preſumptuous

SERM. III.

ous Plea. For who is he, among the Reaſoners of this World, that is able preciſely to determine, in ſuch obſcure Points as theſe, what is *poſſible* or *impoſſible* to be accompliſhed by Almighty Wiſdom and Power? Are our Notions of theſe two Beings, *God* and *Man*, ſo full every way, and diſtinct and clear, as to ſatisfy us, that ſuch an Union is in itſelf repugnant, and altogether impoſſible? Would we impartially conſider, what paſſes within our Minds, when we employ them in ſuch nice Diſquiſitions as theſe, we ſhould find, that all that paſſes there is Darkneſs and Confuſion; and that we can diſcern too little of either of theſe Natures, to be able to pronounce, with any Aſſurance, that it is *impoſſible* for them to be joined together in One Perſon.

We have no juſt Idea indeed of the *Manner*, in which ſuch an Union may be effected; but ſo neither have we of the *Manner* of that Union, which is between our Souls and Bodies. An Union, which we can as little explain,

or

or comprehend, as even that of the Deity with the Humanity; and which yet we can no more doubt of, than we can of our own Being and Subſiſtence. Will the moſt Keen and Piercing Wit among the Sons of Men ſay, that he perceives plainly, how a *Corporeal* can be joined to an *Incorporeal* Being; and what are thoſe common Ties and Ligaments that hold them: how they act upon each other; move, and are moved by Turns; and what kind of Contact that is, by which ſuch Motions are mutually communicated? No; theſe are Secrets, which we can no ways, by any Strength of Thought, fathom; and which perhaps we ſhould have been apt to imagine inconſiſtent and impoſſible Speculations, had not *Experience* taught us, that Things *are* really ſo, though we cannot poſſibly find out *how* they *ſhould* be ſo. SERM. III.

Had the Spirits of Men been once unbodied, and had God revealed to them in that State of Separation, that he deſigned them for another Station in

SERM. III. a Lower World; and, in order to it, would clothe them with groſs and ſenſible *Matter*, and make them act continually in Concert with fleſhly Organs, and with Dependence upon them, No doubt but one of theſe *Forward Reaſoners* would have concluded immediately, that the Thing propoſed was *Unphiloſophical* and *Abſurd*. --- And therefore, that either the Revelation did not really come from God, or that this could not be the Senſe of it. --- For how could Body and Spirit, Things ſo totally different, any ways meet together and compoſe one entire Subject? Or how could they, when thus met, have any poſſible Influence on each other?

Theſe therefore are immodeſt and unjuſtifiable Ways of Reaſoning, which would perſuade us to reject Truths, on the Account of ſome *Suppoſed Impoſſibilities*, of which it is *manifeſtly impoſſible* that we ſhould have any clear and adequate Conception. And therefore in all ſuch Caſes, it becomes not us to ſay, what can, or cannot be done,

or

or what the nature of Things will, or will not admit of. The Short and only Sure Point, upon which Controverſies of this kind muſt turn, is, to ſee what God, in his Holy Word, has aſſured us concerning them. SERM. III.

As to the ſecond Part of the Objection, That there were *Other* Ways of bringing about the Pardon of Sin, and the Salvation of Man; far be it from us to preſcribe to God, or to ſay—That Infinite Goodneſs and Wiſdom itſelf *could* have found out *no Other* Expedient. But ſince *this*, and *no other*, *was* made uſe of by God, we muſt needs think it the *moſt proper* of *Any*, and the beſt proportioned to thoſe Ends and Purpoſes, for which He deſigned it. And though it becomes us rather implicitly to adore the Divine Wiſdom, than curiouſly to enquire into the Reaſons, and boldly to ſound the Depths of it; yet is there ſome Light afforded us in Scripture, whereby we may diſcover a mighty *Fitneſs* and *Congruity* between the *Method* that

SERM. III. that was uſed, and the *End* that was brought about by it.

Guiding ourſelves therefore by the Diſcoveries made to us on this Head in Holy Writ, we may ſafely venture to ſay — It was fit and requiſite, that our Redeemer ſhould be *God*, that, by the Infinite Dignity of his Perſon, the Value of the Sacrifice, which he made of himſelf in the Fleſh, might be ſo far enhanced, as to become a ſufficient Atonement for the Sins of the whole World: That the *Laws* which he ſhould publiſh, might carry in them the utmoſt Obligation and Force: That his *Doctrine* might have the higheſt Authority: That we being aſſured of his abſolute Security from Sin, might look up to his *Example*, as to a *perfect Pattern* of Holineſs; and in all things, without *Doubt*, or *Fear*, implicitly follow his Steps.

It was fit he ſhould be *God*, that he might give an Inſtance of *Infinite Condeſcenſion* and *Love* toward us, and might from thence engage us to *Love* and *Obey* him alſo, *without Bounds:* That he might be

be enabled in our behalf to Vanquiſh *Satan*, and all the Powers of Hell, and erect a Spiritual Kingdom in the Hearts of Men, by triumphing firſt over all the Strength, and Cunning, and Malice of our Spiritual Enemies. SERM. III.

It was highly Expedient alſo, that he ſhould be *Man*, that our Offences might be repaired in that *Nature* which committed them: And *as by one Man's Diſobedience, Many were made Sinners; ſo by the Obedience of One Man, Many might be made Righteous.* Rom. v. 19.

That he might be Qualified from thence, to be a *Merciful and Faithful High Prieſt in Things pertaining to God*, and a proper *Interceſſor* with him for Man, whoſe Infirmities he had tried, whoſe Needs he had been ſenſible of; and, having *himſelf ſuffered and been tempted*, might be *able* and willing *to ſuccour Thoſe that are tempted.* Heb. ii. 17. Ver. 18.

Laſtly, That by appearing in Human Form, he might make a Difference between the rigorous and aſtoniſhing Diſpenſation of the *Law*, and that milder

SERM. III. one of *Grace:* Coming to us in the moſt familiar and winning way: Inſtructing us in our Duty like one of us: And propoſing to us a lively and full Example of what he taught, in what he did and ſuffered for us.

Theſe are ſome of the Accounts which God has hinted to us in Scripture, why his Infinite Wiſdom was pleaſed to pitch upon this Way, rather than any other, of reconciling Man to himſelf. And yet, after all the Accounts we can give ourſelves of it, we cannot but confeſs it to be an Abyſs of Mercy, which neither *We* nor *Angels* are able to pry into; and which God alone who contrived it, can fully explain and comprehend.

Let us forbear therefore to wade farther into the Depth of this great Myſtery of *God manifeſt in the Fleſh*; and let us ſatisfy ourſelves with believing it, as God has revealed it, without indulging our Curioſity in an unprofitable Search after the Reaſons, which induced God to order the Stupendous Work of our Redemption in ſo inconceivable a Manner:

And let us proceed to draw from thence thoſe plain practical Improvements, which may render it profitable unto Godlineſs, and with which it will readily furniſh us. SERM. III.

And the firſt, and moſt natural Uſe we are to make of it, is, to raiſe to ourſelves from thence Matter of *Thankfulneſs and Spiritual Joy*. *Behold, I bring you,* ſaid the Angel to the Shepherds, good *Tidings of great Joy which ſhall be to all People: For unto you is born this Day in the City of* David *a Saviour, which is* Chriſt *the Lord.* And theſe indeed are the beſt Tidings that ever God ſent, or the World received: Tidings of no leſs than Freedom from the Guilt and Puniſhment of Sin; of a Way opened to Repentance, and the Favour of God; to Peace of Conſcience in this World, and Everlaſting Happineſs in the next. Luk. ii. 10, 11.

Before the Coming of *Chriſt*, all the Account we could have of theſe things from the Light of Nature, went no farther than this.—That the Breach of any of God's Laws brought Guilt along with it; and that Guilt made us liable to Puniſhment.

SERM. III. niſhment.—Whether God, upon any Conſiderations, would ever remit this Puniſhment, was more than mere Reaſon could poſſibly tell us. For the Juſtice of God certainly required, that Sin ſhould be followed with Puniſhment: Nor was this inconſiſtent with the Goodneſs of God, which was otherwiſe ſufficiently manifeſted to us. Under this kind of Dark and Uncomfortable Reaſonings were we left, till Chriſt *the Sun of Righteouſneſs aroſe with Healing in his Wings*, and publiſhed the Goſpel of Repentance, and Remiſſion of Sins. All Thanks and Praiſe therefore be given to him, that our Tongues can poſſibly expreſs, or our Hearts conceive! *Abraham*, at a mighty Diſtance, and upon a very Dim and Imperfect View of it, *rejoiced to ſee this Day*: The Angels, who themſelves had no Intereſt in this Deliverance, yet were highly pleaſed with the Proſpect of thoſe Bleſſings it derived on their Fellow-Creature, Man; and therefore ſang that Hymn on this Occaſion, which the Evangeliſt has recorded.——*Glory be to God on High, on Earth*

Mal. iv. 2.

Joh. viii. 56.

Luke ii. 14.

Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men. And shall not *We*, for whose Sake this Peace was sent on Earth, and to whom all this Good-will was meant, shall not *We* also *give Glory to God on high, and rejoice before him with Reverence?* Surely *this* is News, at which (as *Isaiah* prophesies of the Miraculous Effects that should take place in the Kingdom of the Messiah) *the Lame Man should leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb should sing.* Isa. xxxv. 6.

SERM. III.

A second Improvement that should be made of this Doctrine, is, to raise our *Love* to God from hence, to all the Degrees of which it is capable.

For Love surely deserves Returns of Love; and the highest Instances of Love, the highest Returns of it. Now *in this was manifested the Love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the World, that we might live through him. Herein is Love* (as St. *John* continues his Argument) *Not that We loved God* (that is, loved God first, and, by that means, drew down his Love upon us) *but that He loved us* (antecedently, freely) *and* 1 Joh. iv. 9, 10.

SERM. III. *ſent his Son to be the Propitiation for our Sins.*

Had God ſent the meaneſt Attendant in the Court of Heaven, to publiſh abroad the good Tidings of his free and voluntary Pardon of Sin, ſhould we not have entertained it as a Meſſage of unſpeakable Love! How much more, when he ſends his Son, his only begotten Son, on this Errand! When he ſends him to partake of our Nature, and of all the Infirmities, Miſeries, Shame, and Pain that attend it; and at laſt to be made a Sacrifice for our Sins by the very Hands of thoſe Men, for whoſe Sake he left Heaven! This raiſes the Motive ſo high, that our *Lips are fain when we ſpeak of it*; and our Heart melts away almoſt under the Senſe of that exceſſive Burthen of Love which lies upon us.

But how ſtrangely is the Force of this Motive weakened by thoſe who make *Chriſt* a *mere Man*, not the Eternal Son of God, ſent out to us from the Boſom of his Father! For at this rate the *Love of God* toward us abates very much;

much; and then, I am afraid, *Ours* toward Him will proportionably abate with it. For the higher Apprehenſions we have of God's Antecedent Love to Man, the ſtronger will our Endeavours ſtill be to raiſe our Affections up to a Pitch ſome way ſuitable to thoſe Apprehenſions. SERM. III.

So that, whether theſe Men have, by this Expedient, leſſened the Difficulties of their *Faith*, or not (which is Matter of Diſpute) ſure we are, that they have evidently leſſened the Argument for their *Love* by it.

Another plain Uſe we are to make of this Doctrine is, to give us an *high Senſe* of *the Dignity of our Nature*, and an hearty *Diſpleaſure* at thoſe Sins which debaſe and diſhonour it.

Behold now, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* argues, is that Prophecy of the *Pſalmiſt* concerning *Man* fulfilled in your Ears.—— *Thou haſt crowned him with Glory and Honour, and haſt ſet him over the Works of thine Hands: Thou haſt put all Things in Subjection under his Feet*; that Heb. ii 7.

SERM. III. is, The *Human Nature*, by its Aſſumption to the *Divine*, is now advanced far above Principalities and Powers, and every created Being: Nay, it is, in the *Perſon* of *Chriſt*, become an *Object of Adoration*, even to Spirits of the firſt Rank and Order. For, as the ſame Apoſtle interprets another Heb. i. 6. Paſſage of the *Pſalmiſt*, *When God brought his firſt begotten Son into the World, he ſaith, Let all the Angels of God worſhip him.*

Should not ſuch a Reflexion as this make us reſolve to do nothing beneath that Nature, which God has ſo highly honoured? Not to pollute it with vile Affections and Luſts; Not to ſet it upon mean and unworthy Purſuits, and on Phil. iii. 19, 20, 21. *minding Earthly Things*; but to have our *Converſation in Heaven*; *from whence alſo we look for the Saviour, the Lord* Jeſus Chriſt, *who ſhall change our Vile Body, that it may be faſhioned like unto his Glorious Body?*

A Senſe of Birth and Noble Blood will often keep Men from doing things beneath themſelves, when no other Motive

tive can reſtrain them: And ſhall it not be ſufficient to preſerve us from every Evil and defiling Work, to conſider our near *Alliance* with *God* himſelf, by the Intervention of the *Man Chriſt Jeſus?* Surely ſuch a Conſideration ſhould engage us, after the moſt powerful Manner, to *purify our Natures, even as his is pure*; and to *cleanſe ourſelves from all Filthineſs of Fleſh and Spirit.* SERM. III. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

And as God's aſſuming our Nature ſhould make us reflect often on the Dignity and Worth of it, and reſolve not to defile *That* with baſe and brutiſh Enjoyments which *Chriſt* hath thus Ennobled and Sanctified; ſo, on the other hand,

The *Condeſcenſion* alſo of the Son of God, in this Myſterious Work of our Redemption, ſhould infuſe into us a Spirit of *Univerſal Humility*, Since He, *who was the Brightneſs of his Father's Glory, and the expreſs Image of his Perſon*, emptied himſelf willingly of all that Glory, to become a Vile and Miſerable Creature for the Salvation of Men; what a deep Lowlineſs Heb. i. 3.

of

SERM. III. of Mind ought *We* (in Imitation of him) to carry about us, through the ſeveral Stages of Life, and the different Adminiſtrations of Providence? How willing ſhould it make us to undertake any Work, to be ſeen in any Office, though never ſo mean and low, that tends any way to the Good and Welfare of Mankind? It is the Great Apoſtle's Argument, *Let nothing be done*, ſays he, *through Strife, or Vain-glory; but in Lowlineſs of Mind, let each eſteem other better than themſelves. Look not every Man on his own things, but every Man alſo on the Things of others. Let this Mind be in you, which was alſo in* Chriſt Jeſus; *Who being in the Form of God, thought it not Robbery to be equal with God; but made himſelf of no Reputation, and took upon him the Form of a Servant; And being found in Faſhion as a Man, he humbled himſelf, and became obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Croſs.*

Phil. ii. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

A *Fifth* thing I would recommend to you, from conſidering the Incarnation of *Chriſt*, is, that we would take care to trace all the Steps of that *Example* which

which he ſet us in the Fleſh; and which SERM. that he might ſet us, was one great III. End of his taking our Nature upon him. And, Oh! let not *this End* be fruſtrated, by our neglecting to look up to that admirable Pattern of all Virtue and Holineſs in the *Life* of the Immaculate *Jeſus*, which the four Goſpels have afforded us! A *Life*, as uſeful to be handed down to us in all its Circumſtances, as his very *Precepts* themſelves. For in *that* he exemplified his Precepts, and gave an Inſtance of the Practicableneſs, the Beauty, and the Power of them. Such an Inſtance, as charms the Eyes, and engages the Hearts of all that behold it; and will, if well attended to, have the ſame Influence upon *us*, that the enjoying the immediate View of God, Face to Face, once had upon *Moſes*: It will make us ſhine with Part of that Luſtre we are looking upon, and tranſform us into ſome Kind of Reſemblance with it. *We all with open Face, beholding as in a Glaſs the Glory of the Lord,* that is, viewing carefully the Image of 2 Cor. iii. 18.

our

SERM. III. our Lord's Life, as it is drawn to us in the Glaſs of the Evangeliſts, and ſtudying to expreſs it in ourſelves, *we ſhall be changed* (as it follows) *into the ſame Image from Glory to Glory*; from one Degree of Virtue and Perfection to another, till at laſt *we arrive at the very Meaſure of the Stature of the Fulneſs of Chriſt.*

Epheſ. iv. 13.

I ſhall mention but one Improvement more of the Doctrine of the Day, and then conclude.——And that is, that we ſhould take Occaſion from hence, highly to eſteem and reverence the Evangelical Diſpenſation: To value and prize that Everlaſting Goſpel, which *Chriſt* ſealed to us with his Blood, above all other Books, Religions, and Philoſophies; above all other Methods of Living and Dying that have been ever taught, or practiſed in the World.

Were there nothing contained in it but that one *faithful Saying, worthy of all Acceptation, that Chriſt Jeſus came into the World to ſave Sinners:* even *that* ſhould recommend it more to us, and

1 Tim. i. 15.

make

make us take greater Delight in peruſing it, than turning over all the Volumes of Wit and Reaſon, all the Diſcourſes of Moral Virtue, all the Treatiſes of Arts and Sciences, which the Learned Part of Mankind among the *Gentiles* have afforded us: We ſhould count them all but Droſs and *Dung*, in compariſon of the *Excellency of the Knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus.* SERM. III. Phil. iii. 8.

But the beſt Expreſſion of our Reverence towards this Goſpel, is, to comply with the Terms of it. Let us remember, that the laſt Scope of the whole *Myſtery of Godlineſs*, is, to oblige Mankind to be good and virtuous; and to lead Lives anſwerable to ſuch bright Diſcoveries and Motives, as Revelation has propoſed to us. And therefore let me exhort and beſeech every one of you this Day, as ye would not (as far as in you lies) fruſtrate the Deſign of our Saviour's Birth; as ye would not baffle the Truth of thoſe Prophecies concerning the Innocence and Purity of the Lives of Men under the Reign of the *Meſſiah*; and as ye would not *hereafter* wiſh,

SERM. III. wiſh, that your Saviour had never been born, nor you yourſelves neither; to be careful for your Parts to anſwer the great End of his Incarnation, and to live as becomes a People, that have been thus Redeemed of the Lord.

For how ſhall ye eſcape, if ye neglect ſo great Salvation?

Temptations

Temptations not Irreſiſtible.

A

SERMON

Preached at

St. JAMES's Chapel,

February 16, 1710-11.

1 COR. x. 13.

God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the Temptation alſo make a Way to eſcape.

AMONG the various Methods made uſe of by Men, to juſtify or extenuate their Sinful Compliances, there

SERM. IV.

SERM. IV. there is no Plea more common in the Mouths of Libertines, than This; That, conſidering the Weakneſs of Human Nature, and the Strength of ſome Temptations, 'tis not to be expected that we ſhould get the better of them. The ſtrict Rules of Virtue are indeed enjoined us: But in this State of Frailty and Infirmity, we muſt (ſay they) be ſometimes allowed to deviate from them. We are ſolicited ſo powerfully by Evil Objects *without*, and puſhed on ſo violently by Evil Inclinations *within*, that 'tis impoſſible but that *both* theſe ſhould now and then prevail, againſt the beſt Reaſons, and the ſtrongeſt Reſolutions. This is an Opinion with which Senſual Men uſually flatter themſelves; wiſh true firſt, and believe true afterwards. But how Vain and Groundleſs an Opinion it is, the Determination of the Apoſtle, in the Words of the Text, may inform us. *God is faithful*, &c.

The plain Purport of which Words is, "That God adjuſts always, and "proportions the Strength of Tempta-

"tions

" tions to our Power of reſiſting them, SERM.
" and never lays a greater Burthen upon IV.
" us, than he either *finds*, or *makes* us able
" to bear."

A very Important and Comfortable Truth! of great Uſe to ſupport the Truly *Good and Pious* under the various Evils of Life, and Allurements of Senſe, which ſurround them; and to reclaim the *Bad*, who indulge themſelves in Vice, upon the ſuppoſed Impoſſibility of being entirely Virtuous and Blameleſs, from their Falſe and Carnal Reaſonings.

In order therefore to Strengthen and Encourage the *One*, and to Convince and Undeceive the *Other*, I ſhall make it my Buſineſs in what follows:

Firſt, To *Explain* and *State* this Truth. I.

Secondly, To *Confirm* it by ſundry Ways of *Proof*, with which *Experience*, *Reaſon*, and *Revelation* will furniſh us. And then, II.

SERM. IV. III. *Thirdly*, To Apply it, in a few plain Words of *Exhortation* and *Reproof*, ſuch as the *Argument* naturally ſuggeſts, and the *Time* will permit me to make uſe of.

I. *Firſt*, I ſhall Explain and State this Truth.

And in order to it, I obſerve

1. That the Apoſtle is not ſpeaking of the Powers of *mere* Human Nature, but of Human Nature *Divinely aſſiſted and ſupported*. He ſays not, that a Man, of *himſelf*, hath Strength enough to reſiſt all Inducements to Sin, and to ſtand his Ground (as the *Pelagians* afterwards vainly talked) but that he ſhall be *enabled* to do this, in virtue of a *Superior* Principle, and by the Help of *Divine Grace*; which, in ſuch Exigencies, ſhall ſurely be beſtowed on him. *God* (he ſays) *will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*—Intimating, that we *ſhould* be tempted above what we are able, if *God* did not interpoſe and help us. And again, *God will, with*

with the Temptation alſo, make a Way to eſcape; Which implies, that we often could not eſcape, unleſs God made a Way for us.—I obſerve SERM. IV.

2. From the Subject of the Apoſtle's Diſcourſe, that neither is it his Intention to affirm, that we ſhall, by any Meaſure of Divine Grace imparted to us in this Life, be ſo far enabled to baffle all *manner* of Temptations, as to live *perfectly Spotleſs* and *Sinleſs*; but only, that we ſhall be preſerved from falling into *Great and Heinous, into deliberate and Preſumptuous Sins*; ſuch as, when Committed, throw us out of the Favour of God, lay waſte the Conſcience, and require a particular and ſolemn Repentance, to render us capable of Salvation. For ſuch was that Sin, which the *Corinthians*, at this time, were in danger of Committing, a Compliance with Idolaters, in partaking of their Idol Feaſts. Alas! it cannot be otherwiſe, but that, in the very beſt of Men, Sins of Omiſſion and Infirmity ſhould abound. Let us ſtand never ſo much upon our Guard, there

SERM. IV. *will* be Lapſes, there *will* be Inadvertencies, there *will* be Surprizes: All therefore that we can in this State of Imperfection depend on, is, That through the Grace of God we ſhall be preſerved from ſuch Enormous Offences, as are Inconſiſtent with a Sincere Piety, and Habitual Holineſs; not that we ſhall be totally freed from Human Frailties and Failings.—Further

3. This *Supernatural* Aſſiſtance, which enables us to reſiſt Temptations, *ſuppoſes* our Uſe of *Natural* Means, and our *Concurrence* with it to the beſt of our Power. 'Tis a *Co-operating* Cauſe, which acts only in *proportion* to our own Endeavours; but imparts not its *Extraordinary* ſuſtaining Strength and Virtue, unleſs where we exert and make uſe of that *ordinary* Strength we have. Temptations therefore to the moſt Groſs and Grievous Sins may, in *ſome* Circumſtances, be *Irreſiſtible*; if it were Originally our *own* Fault, that we were brought into *thoſe* Circumſtances; if, for want of that due Vigilance and Care, which

which we were *obliged* and *able* to employ, the Temptation overtook us. SERM. IV.

For Inſtance; If a Man of reſolved Sobriety, ſhould be ſo far at any time off his Guard, as to indulge himſelf in any unjuſtifiable Degree of Exceſs, he may, by that means, be inevitably betrayed into ſome of the Ill Conſequences of Intemperance. If a Perſon, by Nature warm and paſſionate, ſhall mix in high Diſputes, or engage in Games of Chance, 'tis not to be expected that he ſhould preſerve himſelf free from Offence. His Paſſions will, of Courſe, be agitated, and inflamed; his *Heart* will now and then *think*, and his Mouth *utter perverſe* Pro. xxiii. *things*. But there is no Objection from 33. theſe, and ſuch Inſtances as theſe, againſt the Doctrine laid down, which affirms all Temptations to be Conquerable. For this is to be underſtood only of *ſuch* as we Unavoidably fall into, not of *ſuch* as we Voluntarily ſeek. It is not ſuppoſed, that we ſhould have Power always to *Reſiſt*, unleſs we before-hand do what is in our Power to *Shun* Temptation.

SERM. IV. These are the ſeveral Reſtrictions, under which the *Truth* implied in the Text muſt be underſtood. Which having thus *Explained* and *Stated*, I go on now, in the

II. *Second* Place, to *Confirm* by Various Ways of Proof, ſuch as *Experience*, *Reaſon*, or *Revelation* will ſuggeſt to us.

And the firſt Way of proving it, ſhall be by *Experience*.

In vain do Libertines pretend, that Human Nature is too weak and frail to reſiſt what we have Authentic Proof, that, as weak and as frail as it is, it *hath* oftentimes reſiſted. There is no Temptation, either of Deſire, or Fear of Pleaſure, or Pain, nothing that can either *Allure* us to Sin, or *Scare* us from our Duty, but what *hath* been actually withſtood and baffled by thoſe Holy Men and Women that have gone before us: And what *hath* been already done, *may* be repeated; unleſs Human Nature be a diſ-

a different thing *now*, from what is was *then*; which no one, I ſuppoſe, will pretend. SERM. IV.

Can a Man look up to the Examples of the Primitive *Chriſtians?* Can he reflect on the Lives and Deaths of the Saints, Martyrs, and Confeſſors of old; on what they *did*, and what they *ſuffered*; and pretend to ſay, after this, that any Solicitations of Senſe are irreſiſtible, any Part of Virtue is impracticable?

Were they not Men of the *ſame* Paſſions and Infirmities as we are? Had they not the *ſame* Senſe of Pleaſure and Pain? Were they not ſurrounded with the *ſame* tempting Objects? And had they *any* Aſſiſtances, in order to ſtand their Ground, but from that *Holy Spirit*, who will aſſiſt *Us* alſo? And why then ſhould *We* be forced to yield to thoſe Difficulties, over which *They* triumphed?

Let us conſider ſome few of thoſe many plain Inſtances of this Kind, which are recorded in the Holy Story. The Temptation of *Example* and Reign-

SERM. IV. ing *Cuſtom*, is one of the ſtrongeſt that beſet Human Nature; and *yet* it hath been reſiſted and defied, in the *utmoſt* Degree of Strength, wherein it is poſſible for us to imagine it.

Lot lived in a *Great* and *Filthy* City; ſo *Filthy*, that, as *Great* as it was, *Ten* Good Men could not be found there, to reſcue it from Deſtruction. And yet, amidſt all that bad *Company*, He continued untainted, and preſerved his Innocence. *Noah* lived, not only in a *City*, but in a *World* entirely debauched; when Gen. vi. 13. *All Fleſh had corrupted its Ways*, and there were but *Seven* Perſons (beſides himſelf) left, Servants of God, and Lovers of Righteouſneſs. And yet, notwithſtanding this Univerſal Depravation of Manners, behold, how untouched he ſtood, and what a Character he bore! Ver. 9. *Noah was a juſt Man, and perfect in his Generations, and Noah walked with God!* Will any Man, after this, pretend, that it is impoſſible to withſtand the Influence of *Ill Example*; and to live up to ſtrict Principles of Religion and Virtue,

Virtue, among Thouſands, and Ten times Ten thouſands, that neglect and deride them? SERM. IV.

The Temptations that ariſe from *Worldly Intereſt and Honour*, cannot poſſibly preſs harder upon any Man, than they did upon *Moſes*. He might have lived in all the Splendor and Luxury of the *Ægyptian* Court, and enjoyed all the Advantages of it, would he but have complied with the Religion and Manners of the Place, and forgotten his Relation to a poor perſecuted People: but he reſolutely withſtood all theſe Charms, and, *when he was come of Years, refuſed to be called the Son of Pharaoh's Daughter; chooſing rather to ſuffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleaſures of Sin for a Seaſon: eſteeming the Reproach of Chriſt greater Riches than the Treaſures of Ægypt.* Heb. xi. 24.

Ye have heard of the Patience of Job! No Man was ever tempted more ſorely, than He, to diſtruſt and deny Divine Providence, and to throw off all Thoughts of Religion. No Man, that we know James v. 11.

SERM. IV. of, except our Bleſſed Saviour, at once ſuffered ſo much, and deſerved ſo little: yet hear, how, on his Dunghill, when deſpoiled of every thing, of his Health, his Poſſeſſions, his Servants, his Sons and Daughters, and Friends; hear, I ſay, how he expreſſes his entire Reliance on God, and his Abſolute Reſignation to him! *Till I die* (ſaies he) *will I not remove my Integrity from me. Though he ſlay me, yet will I truſt in him. Naked came I out of my Mother's Womb, and Naked ſhall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: bleſſed be the Name of the Lord!*

Job xxvii. 5. xiii. 15. i. 21.

To theſe ſeveral *Scripture Inſtances*, I crave leave to add yet *one* more, relating to the Paſſion of *Revenge*; one of the moſt Importunate and Violent, that are incident to Human Nature; which yet we are ſure is conquerable, under all the ſtrongeſt Temptations to it, that can well be conceived, from the Account of Good *David*. He had *Saul*, his great Enemy, at his Mercy; an Enemy, that had

had often ſought his Life, in the baſeſt, and moſt unmanly Methods, that had *hunted* him (as his own Expreſſion is) *like a Partridge upon the Mountains:* an Enemy that ſtood between him and a Throne; ſo that nothing was wanted, but the taking off *Saul*, in order to *David's* Reigning. This Enemy, I ſay, he had an Opportunity of removing: The Followers of his Fortune proffered themſelves to be the ready Miniſters of his Revenge; and upon *Them* he might have laid the Blame of the Deed, and have been himſelf (to all Appearance) Innocent and Ignorant of it. This was a Temptation, which ſome Men would have called inſuperable; and yet *He*, we find, actually withſtood it, with ſo Reſolute a Virtue, as the Eloquent Pen of St. *Chryſoſtom* is never more Eloquent, than when he deſcribes it; particularly in that Homily, which is deſigned to ſhew, that *David's* Conqueſt of himſelf, in this Inſtance, was more great and glorious, than his Victory over *Goliah*. For in vain did that Son of Violence *Abiſhai* puſh

SERM. IV.

1 Sam. xxvi. 20.

SERM. IV.

puſh him on, by ſaying; *God hath delivered thine Enemy into thine Hand this Day: now therefore let me ſmite him, I pray thee, with the Spear, even to the Earth, at once, and I will not ſmite a Second Time.* His Honourable and Pious Return to this baſe Counſel was—*As the Lord liveth, the Lord ſhall ſmite him, or his Day ſhall come to die, or he ſhall deſcend into Battle, and periſh: but deſtroy Thou him not: for who can ſtretch forth his Hand againſt the Lord's Anointed, and be Guiltleſs?*

1 Sam. xxvi. 8, &c.

From Unqueſtionable Accounts therefore it appears, that all the ſoreſt Trials of Virtue, which can any ways happen, have been withſtood and baffled by Men of like Paſſions with us, and may therefore be withſtood and baffled ſtill, with Equal Reſolution and Innocence.

But becauſe it may be ſaid, that *Inſtances* do not conclude *Univerſally:* it is certain indeed, that whatever hath once been done, may be done again, by Perſons endued with like Degrees of Holy Fortitude and Firmneſs; but it doth

doth not therefore follow, that I am capable of doing it, whoſe Infirmity perhaps may be greater than *Other* Mens, in *This* Particular: SERM. IV.

Becauſe ſuch Pretences may, I ſay, be made, I ſhall therefore proceed (further) to Confirm the Truth laid down, by ſome General Reaſonings, drawn from the *Nature*, either of *Temptation* itſelf, or of that *Goſpel Grace*, which is to ſupport us under it; or of *Man*, the Subject of that *Grace*; or of *God*, the Beſtower of it.

They who ſay, *any* Temptation is not to be conquered, did they conſider what they ſaid, would find, that they ſpeak abſurdly, and inconſiſtently. For a *Temptation* is only another Word for an *Experiment*, or *Tryal*; a Tryal, whether we will do, or forbear ſuch a thing; whether we will comply with, or reject ſuch a Propoſal: and therefore it ſuppoſes it to be in our Power to do, or forbear; to yield, or not to yield; elſe it were *no* Temptation, *no* Tryal of us. We are not ſaid to *Try*, *which* way a thing

SERM. IV.

thing will act, that is *neceſſarily* determined to act *One* way beforehand.—To ſay therefore, as Senſualiſts do, that *Some* Temptations are *not* reſiſtible, is when that Expreſſion is examined, really to ſay, That *ſome* Temptations are *not* Temptations; for if they *are*, their very being *ſuch* implies, that it is poſſible to withſtand them.

What is *Grace*, but an Extraordinary Supply of Ability and Strength to reſiſt Temptations, given us on purpoſe to make up the Deficiency of our Natural Strength to do it? And therefore, if our Natural Strength, together with this Divine Supply, be not now equal to every Temptation; the Grace of God may *thus* far be ſaid to have been given us in *Vain*; in as much as it doth not, and cannot reach the *End* for which it is beſtowed.

Is not *Man*, by Nature, a *Free* Agent? Hath he not Liberty and Will? The great Difference between him and Brutes, doth it not lie in this, That *they* are unavoidably conſtrained to act *One* way, while

while *He* hath always the Power of determining himſelf on *this* Side, or on *that*, of Chooſing or Refuſing? But now, if there be any ſuch things as *Inducements* to Sin, that are altogether *inſuperable*, there is an End of his boaſted *Freedom*; for in *thoſe* Inſtances, he acts as neceſſarily, as mechanically, as *the Beaſt that periſh*. The great *End of* Man is, to Glorify God, by Living according to the *perfect* Rule of right Reaſon and Virtue; and yet impoſſible it is, that he ſhould ever attain *this* End, while he converſes with Temptations, which he cannot ſurmount. Now all *Other* Beings (Animate, or Inanimate) have Powers, that enable them to fulfil the *Deſign* of their Creation: Is *Man* alone utterly deſtitute of theſe Powers? Is the Nobleſt Creature on Earth framed to *No End?* or (which is all one) under an utter Incapacity of reaching *that End?* Is *He* only incapable of arriving at any Degree of Perfection in *his* way, for whoſe Uſe and Service all thoſe *other* Creatures were made, which are confeſſedly

SERM. IV.

Pſ. xlix. 12.

SERM. IV. ſedly perfect in *Theirs?* If This be ſo, he is ſo far from being the Pride and Glory of the Viſible Creation, that he is the Meaneſt, moſt Imperfect, and Contemptible of Beings.

Once more. Let us conſider the *Nature* and *Perfections of God.* He *is*, and *muſt* be Holy, Juſt, and True: And yet He neither *is*, nor *can* be Holy, Juſt, or True, if He places us under *Irreſiſtible* Temptations.

How can He be *Holy*, who is the Author of Sin? And how can He *but* be the Author of Sin, who (according to the Libertines Scheme) hath ſo adapted the Frame of our Mind *within*, to the Impreſſion of Evil Objects from *without*, that it is utterly *impoſſible* for us to withſtand the Force of them? Is not this to have a direct Influence and Efficiency in producing Sin, ſo to order and diſpoſe Second Cauſes, as that they cannot miſs producing it? Now an Holineſs that *permits* Sin to be in the World, and *hates* all the while what it permits, we are able to conceive: But an Holineſs, which directly

directly *occaſions* Sin, is utterly incon- SERM. IV.
ceivable.

Nor is the *Juſtice* of God leſs blemiſhed by this Pretence, than his *Holineſs*. For how can *He* be ſaid to be *Juſt*, who (as theſe Men tell us) places us under *Irreſiſtible* Temptations; and yet (as He himſelf aſſures us) will puniſh us for *not* reſiſting them; that is, makes us unavoidably obnoxious to Sin firſt, and then animadverts upon us for the Commiſſion of it afterwards? Let any Man ſay worſe than this of *Injuſtice* and *Cruelty*, if he can.

The Laſt Divine Perfection, concerned in this Diſpute, is his *Truth*:—— Which cannot be maintained, if the Libertines Plea in this Caſe be true. The Promiſes of God made to us in Scripture are moſt Expreſs and Full; That he *will perfect his Strength in our Weakneſs*; 2 Cor. xii. that *his Grace ſhall be ſufficient for us*; 9. Rom. viii. that he will *make us more than Conquerors in all Temptations*; and, here in the 37. Text, that he *will not ſuffer us to be tempted, above what we are able*. And

SERM. IV.

he is not a Man that he ſhould lye, or as the Son of Man that he ſhould repent. And yet *as Man*, and as the *Son of Man* is he made by the Favourers of this Looſe Scheme; which is at the Bottom, built on a ſecret Diſtruſt, that God will not, in ſome ſharp and preſſing Inſtances, be as good as his Word; but will leave us to be worſted, where he has promiſed to aſſiſt and ſtrengthen us. Nothing can be plainer, than that he commands us, thoughout his Goſpel, to reject Temptations; to Live above *the Luſts of the Fleſh, the Luſts of the Eye, and the Pride of Life*; to be *perfect, even as he is perfect; and pure, even as he is pure.* To this Point all the Various Applications there made to our Hopes and Fears, all his Threatenings and Encouragements tend.

Numb. xxiii. 19.

But now, if at the Time that he lays, and thus earneſtly preſſes theſe Precepts upon us, he knows it is not in our Power to obey them: if he invites, if he wooes, and beſeeches us to do that, which he hath before-hand ſo contrived

us,

us, as to make it utterly impoſſible for us to do, he deals not as ſincerely, and fairly with *Us*, as he hath obliged us, under the Penalty of Eternal Wrath, to deal *One with Another. That be far from Thee*, O Lord; that be far from Thee to *do*; and *as far* from any of *Us* to think, or to ſay! No; *God* is not *inſincere*, when he commands, urges, perſuades, us not to comply with ſinful Solicitations; *Man* only is *inſincere*, when he pretends he hath not Strength enough to maſter them. SERM. IV.

Let us therefore place the Odious Reproach, where it ought to lie.—Let us give Honour to the *Divine* Truth and Uprightneſs in laying theſe Commands upon us, by confeſſing *our own* Inſincerity and Falſeneſs, in endeavouring to palliate and excuſe our Deviations from them. *Let God be true, and every Man a Lyar.* Rom. iii. 4.

Thus much for the *Confirmation* of this Truth. It remains that I ſhould,

SERM. IV. III. *Thirdly*, Apply it, in a *few plain* Words of *Exhortation* and *Reproof*, ſuch as the *Argument* naturally ſuggeſts, and the *Time* will permit me to make uſe of.

And *firſt*, there is Matter of mighty *Comfort* and *Encouragement* ariſing from hence to the Sincerely Good and Virtuous; who may now walk on chearfully in the Paths of Virtue, under theſe Reflexions and Aſſurances; ſatisfied, that no Conflict ſhall happen to them in the Courſe of their Spiritual Warfare, in which their great Adverſary ſhall be too hard for them; and, on that Account, eaſy, and at Reſt in their Mind, with regard to the Various Trials and Evils of Life, that *may*, or *may not* befall them.

Pſ. cxii. 7. *They ſhall not be afraid of Evil Tidings, nor dejected at the Thought of approaching*
Ver. 8. *Dangers: Their Heart is ſtabliſhed, and ſhall not ſhrink; it ſtandeth faſt, and believeth in the Lord.*

Many

Many are frighted from a brave and reſolute Practice of their Duty, by conſidering before-hand, that ſuch and ſuch Inconveniences may poſſibly attend it, which they know not whether they ſhall be able to grapple with. But *why are ye fearful, O ye of little Faith!* Is not He that is *with* You, ſtronger than He that is *againſt* You? And hath he not promiſed, that his Strength ſhall be employed to ſupport Your Weakneſs? *Hath he ſaid it, and ſhall he not make it good!* Therefore, *why are ye troubled! O ye of little Faith!* Were we all thoroughly perſuaded of this important Truth, that *God will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able*; were our Minds conſtantly poſſeſſed with a Lively and Vigorous Apprehenſion of it, there are no Circumſtances of Life ſo ſad, no Evils ſo frightful, no Trials ſo ſharp, but that we might look down upon them with Indifference, and in the midſt of what either we expect or endure, of felt or fancied Dangers, take to ourſelves Words of Holy

SERM. IV.

Matt. viii. 26.

Numb. xxiii. 19.

67055

SERM. IV.

Aſſurance with the *Pſalmiſt*, and ſay, *I will not be afraid for Ten thouſands of Temptations, that have ſet themſelves againſt me round about: Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no Evil: for thou art with me; Thy Rod and Thy Staff comfort me.*

Pſ. viii. 6. Pſ. xxiii. 4.

Secondly, Here is ample Matter of *Reproof* alſo to the *Hypocrite*, and the *Profane* Perſon: *both* which, from a Principle oppoſite to the great Truth of the Text, would fain juſtify, or extenuate their ſinful Compliances. Let not the *Hypocrite* then allow himſelf in a favourite Sin with the ſlight Hope, that *in this thing the Lord will pardon his Servant*, and that one ſmall Fault will be overlooked among a Crowd of other good Qualities. Let him not pretend *Impotence*, in a *particular* Caſe, and expect to be believed when he ſays it, becauſe he doth his Duty ſincerely, and ſtands his Ground firmly upon *other* Occaſions. This is all but *Pretence:* God, who cannot lie, hath aſſured us, that *no* Temptation ſhould overtake us, but what we

2 Kings v. 18.

ſhould

ſhould be enabled to bear: and when he ſaid *no* Temptation, he made no Allowance for a *darling* Infirmity. SERM. IV.

Let the *Profane* and *Diſſolute* Perſon ceaſe to affront God and Man by his Impious and Abſurd Reaſonings! Let it be enough, that he reſolve, at any rate, to be *Impure* and *Lawleſs*; but let him not go on to *defend* his *Impurities*, by reproaching and vilifying Human Nature, and under That, the Wiſe Author and Contriver of it! If he is determined to live a Life of Senſe, and to obey his Luſts, yet let him not boldly and openly juſtify it, by ſaying, that it is *neceſſary* for him to act as he does; and that All Men are in *many* Points, though not perhaps in the very *ſame*, juſt as *He is*; as impotent every whit, and utterly diſabled. For this is defending One Sin with another, and a much greater than the firſt. It is a malicious Deſign of repreſenting *Every* body to be *Wicked*, that *He* may appear *Innocent*. The Perſons that reaſon thus, ſometimes pretend to have an high Regard for the Li-

SERM. IV. berties and Juſt Freedoms of Human Nature in *Civil* Matters, and are mighty uneaſy, and impatient under any Reſtraint of them. If they are ſuch *Friends* to Freedom, in God's Name, let them aſſert it there, where it will be of moſt Importance to them, in the Cauſe of Virtue and Religion. Let them remember themſelves to be, not only freeborn *Engliſhmen*, but freeborn *Chriſtians:* Let them be Jealous of their *Spiritual* Liberty, as well as their *Temporal*; and not tye their own Hands, and deliver themſelves up (as it were) bound and fettered to the Imperious Sway of their Luſts and Paſſions. This is to make Man a Slave, and God a Tyrant; and is by no means of a Piece with their Scheme, nor becoming thoſe who plead for the Rights and Liberties of Human Nature.

Wherefore laying aſide theſe Shifts and Excuſes, let us *All* ſet ourſelves in good earneſt to reſiſt all manner of Temptations: let us put out all the Strength which we naturally *have* to this Purpoſe, and beg of God Supernatural-

ly

ly to ſupply us with what we *have not.* Eſpecially at this Solemn Time, ſet apart to Commemorate the great Conflict of our Saviour with the Tempter in the Wilderneſs, and to prepare and qualify Us for ſuch Spiritual Encounters. Let us look up to the Example of *Chriſt*, and remember how Victorious he was over thoſe fierce Aſſaults of *Satan*; and what Aſſurance he hath given us, that They who tread in his Steps, and reſolutely fight the good Fight, ſhall be alike Victorious. And whilſt we reſiſt, as he did, let us be ſure to uſe the ſame Means of Reſiſtance, that he uſed, *Faſting and Prayer:* For there is *no Kind* of Temptation, but may, by the Joint Force of *Theſe*, be *caſt out.* SERM. IV.

To theſe therefore let us fly, Theſe let us lay hold of, bending our Knees often in private, during this Seaſon of Devotion, and applying ourſelves to the Throne of Grace, in thoſe Excellent Words of the Church, which comprehend in ſhort whatever hath in this Diſcourſe been more largely delivered.

O God,

SERM. IV.

O God, who knoweſt us to be ſet in the midſt of ſo many and great Dangers, that by reaſon of the Frailty of our Natures we cannot ſtand upright; Grant to us ſuch Strength and Protection, as may ſupport us in all Dangers, and carry us through all Temptations, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. To whom, *&c.*

The

The Horrid Imprecation of the Jews, *and the Juſtice and Wiſdom of God in fulfilling it upon them, diſplayed.*

IN A

SERMON

Preached at

St. JAMES's Chapel,

On *Good-Friday*, 1715.

MATTH. xxvii. 25.

Then anſwered all the People, and ſaid, His Blood be on Us, and on our Children!

SERM. V.

THE Hiſtory of the *Jewiſh Nation* is the Hiſtory of *Divine Providence*, from whence, if we peruſe it with Attention, and Diligence, we may learn what

SERM. V.

what are the uſual Methods of God's dealing with a People, of his raiſing or depreſſing, his rewarding or puniſhing them, in proportion to their Moral and Religious Deſerts or Demerits. And there is no Branch of that Hiſtory, which will furniſh us with clearer Inſtructions of this kind, than the Account of what befell the *Jews* upon their Crucifying the Lord of Life, and faſtening the Guilt of that flagitious Act upon Themſelves and their Poſterity; when *all the People anſwered, and ſaid, His Blood be on Us, and on our Children!*

The Reflexions which I intend to make on theſe Words, ſhall be offered to your Thoughts in this Order.

I. I will conſider their Connexion with the preceeding Circumſtances of the Evangeliſt's Account; by which it will appear, with what Solemnity and Deliberation, and how inveterate a Malice and Obſtinacy they were uttered.

II. I will

II. I will ſhew, in how wonderful a Manner this Imprecation was fulfilled on the *Jews*, and is ſtill to this day fulfilling upon them. SERM. V.

III. I will ſuggeſt ſome Reflexions tending to vindicate the Juſtice and Wiſdom of God, in dealing thus ſeverely with this People; his *Juſtice*, in reſpect of the Sufferers themſelves; his *Wiſdom*, with regard to the great Ends and Deſigns he propoſed to himſelf in their Sufferings. From which I ſhall in the

Laſt place, deduce ſome Uſeful and Concerning Inferences.

As to the Firſt of theſe, we may obſerve, that the Imprecation of the Text was an Act, not of ſudden Rage, but of deliberate and unrelenting Malice. They who uttered it, were no Strangers to the Perſon and Character of *Chriſt*;

SERM. V. had been Eye-witneſſes of his ſpotleſs Life and Converſation; had often heard the Heavenly Doctrine he preached, and ſeen the matchleſs Wonders he performed, to confirm the Truth of it; knew the Types and Prophecies, that pointed him out as the *Meſſiah*, and were, at that very time, in full Expectation of their Accompliſhment: And yet reſiſted all this Light and Conviction; and, becauſe their Intereſt and Authority with the People declined by his Means, *took Counſel to ſlay him.*

The Chief Prieſts, the Scribes, and Elders, aſſembled in *Sanhedrim*, condemned him over Night; ſlept upon their unrighteous Judgment, without Remorſe; and, when the Morning was come, led him away to *Pilate* the *Roman* Governor, to whom the Power of Life and Death appertained. *Pilate*, upon Examination, publicly declared, that he found no Fault in him; and, when they inſiſted on his Execution, ſent them to *Herod* the Tetrarch of *Galilee*, within whoſe Territory ſome

Part

Part of our Saviour's Life had been ſpent; but He alſo acquitted him. Glad of *Herod's* concurring Judgment, *Pilate* addreſſes himſelf again to the *Jews*, expoſtulates with them upon their groundleſs Proſecution of *Jeſus*, and labours to divert them from it. When they continued ſtill deaf to all his Intreaties, he tried yet one Experiment more; gave our Saviour up to the Soldiers to be *ſcourged*, hoping, *that Sight* would mitigate the Fury, and move the Compaſſion of his Accuſers; and then propoſes him as the man he was by Cuſtom to releaſe at the Paſſover; and, that he might be ſure to determine their Choice to him, names *Barabbas*, a notorious Robber and Murderer, in Competition with him. Even this Infamous Perſon is thought a fitter Object of Mercy, than *Jeſus*: And now, impatient of Delay, and unſoftened by all theſe Applications, they cry out, more vehemently than ever, *Crucify him, crucify him. When he ſaw therefore that he could prevail nothing* (ſays the Evangeliſt) *he took Water, and waſhed his* SERM. V.

SERM. V. *his Hands before the Multitude, ſaying, I am innocent of the Blood of this Juſt Perſon; ſee Ye to it. Then anſwered All the People, and ſaid, His Blood be on us, and on our Children!*

All the People! Not only thoſe of mean and baſe condition, who are uſually the moſt forward in ſuch Popular Clamours; but the Chief Prieſts, the Scribes and Elders themſelves, who then ſtood before the Tribunal of *Pilate*; not only the Inhabitants of *Jeruſalem*, but the whole *Nation* of the *Jews*, who were then aſſembled to celebrate the Paſchal Solemnity; *All the People*, in the utmoſt Force and Fulneſs of that Expreſſion, *anſwered and ſaid, His Blood be on Us, and on our Children!*

Never ſure was any ſinful Wiſh expreſſed with ſo much Solemnity, Unanimity, and Warmth, or attended every way with ſuch high and horrid Circumſtances of Aggravation; and no wonder, therefore, if it received its Accompliſhment after ſo remarkable a manner, as can, in no other Account of Men, or Times,

Times, be paralleled. Which is what I, in the SERM. V.

Second place, propoſed to conſider and explain. II.

Blood (i. e. Innocent Blood) *defileth the Land* (ſaith their Law) *and the Land cannot be cleanſed of the Blood that is ſhed therein, but by the Blood of him that ſhed it.* This Rule held even of Common Blood, ſpilt by a private Hand; and how then was the Land to be cleanſed of the Blood of the *Meſſiah*, the Son of God, which that whole Nation ſpilt, and made themſelves anſwerable for the Guilt of it? How, but by the Blood of that whole Nation, by their utter Ruin and Exciſion? Which accordingly happened ſoon afterwards, when the Armies of *Veſpaſian* encompaſſed *Jeruſalem.* The Calamities they underwent in that Siege, were ſuch as never befell any other City or Nation. The Account we have of them is aſtoniſhing, and would have ſurpaſſed all Belief, had Numb. xxxv. 33.

SERM. V. it not been given us by One, who was himſelf an Eye-witneſs of them, and a Sharer in them; and who tells us, that no leſs than eleven hundred Thouſand *Jews* fell at that time, either by Sword, or Famine.

It may be worth our while to obſerve from that Hiſtorian ſome Circumſtances, which ſhew, how ſtrict a Correſpondence there was between their Crime and their Puniſhment; an Hiſtorian that had nothing leſs in his View, than to prove, that the One was adapted to the Other, and a juſt Conſequence of it.

The Nation, collected in a Body to celebrate that Paſſover, had committed this crying Sin; and the Vengeance of God overtook them at another Paſchal Seaſon, when they were again thus embodied, when all the *Jews* were ſhut up in *Jeruſalem*, as Beaſts in a Slaughter-houſe, and none could eſcape the Sword of the *Romans*.

The Rejection of the true *Meſſiah* was their Crime, and their hearkening to many falſe *Meſſiahs* afterwards was the

Source of their Calamities; their frequent Revolts on that Account being the true Cauſe of the Reſolution that was taken to extirpate and deſtroy them. SERM. V.

They purſued our Saviour to the Croſs, that they might not be ſuſpected of ſetting up a Rival Title to that of *Cæſar*; *leſt* (ſaid they) *the Romans come, and take away our Place and Nation.* John xi. 48. What they endeavoured to avoid by this Wickedneſs, befell them on the Account of it: The *Romans* came, and took away their Place and Nation ſo entirely, that, after the ſecond Attempt made upon them by *Titus*, they never had the leaſt Shadow of Magiſtracy and Government amongſt them, and after their final Deſtruction by *Adrian*, they were not allowed, ſo much as to live in *Jewry*, no not upon Terms of the loweſt, and moſt abject Slavery.

Nor did the Vengeance of God ſtop here, but hath purſued and doth ſtill purſue them into all the Corners of the Earth, whither they have been driven; in all which, their Circumſtances are ſo

SERM. V.

ſingular, ſo unlike thoſe of Other Exiles and Captives, and ſo different from what befell them in their former Diſperſions, that no Account can be given of their thus Suffering beyond Example, but from their Sinning beyond Example in the Crucifixion of our Saviour.

To what elſe can we aſcribe that Univerſal Contempt and Abhorrence they have undergone from *Chriſtians* of all ſorts, nay even from *Turks* and *Heathens*; ſo as to become, in the Prophetic Expreſſions of *Moſes*, *an Aſtoniſhment, a Proverb, and a By-word among all Nations, whither the Lord hath led them?*

To what elſe can be imputed their Excluſion from Offices and Honours every where, and even from the Common Benefits of Strangers? The frequent Oppreſſions and Exactions, under which they have groaned, the various Expulſions and Maſſacres that have befallen them? Wherever they came, *they have* (as the Pen of the ſame Prophet deſcribes their Caſe) *found no Eaſe, neither hath the Sole of their Foot had Reſt; but the Lord hath given*

Deut. xxviii. 65.

given them a Trembling Heart, and Failing of Eyes, and Sorrow of Mind. SERM. V.

In their other Deportations, they had often the Favour of their Conquerors; were permitted by them freely and publicly to exerciſe their Religion, and even to make Proſelytes, to live under their own Laws and Cuſtoms, and to retain ſome Shadow of their Domeſtic Polity and Government. But in this Laſt, they have had none of theſe Privileges, or Encouragements; none ſecured to them by Law, but indulged only by a Secret, and Precarious Connivance; which has been limited and withdrawn, according to the Will and Pleaſure of their Maſters.

Finally, whereas the longeſt of their Captivities, after they ſettled in *Canaan*, laſted but ſeventy Years; *This* has endured for above Sixteen hundred; that is, for a greater Tract of Time than intervened, from the firſt building of their Temple by *Solomon*, to its final Deſtruction by *Titus*. Thus long have they been no Nation, but ſo

SERM. V. many ſcattered Herds of Vagabonds, without any Temple-worſhip, or Sacrifices (the chief Part of their Religion) and without any reaſonable Hope, or Proſpect of enjoining them. All the Attempts, that have been made towards rebuilding their Holy Place, or even towards recovering their Country out of the Hands of Infidels, have been defeated, and blaſted by God in ſo remarkable a manner, as if he were jealous of every Event, which might ſeem to open a Way home to this wretched People, and give them the leaſt Glympſe of a Deliverance from their Bondage.

And all this while (which is the moſt ſtrange and ſingular Circumſtance of their Puniſhment) they have continued unmixed, unincorporated with any of the Nations of the Earth, amidſt whom they dwelt; their Preſervation in which Separate State is more wonderful, than their Total Diſperſion; and could not have happened for ſo long a time, ſo uniformly, every where, without the Immediate Interpoſition of God's Providence,

dence, to prevent a Coalition; in order to render them, by that means, Standing and Illuſtrious Monuments of his Vengeance, to all Nations and Ages. The Juſtice and Wiſdom of which Severe Proceeding, I ſhall now in the SERM. V.

Third place, briefly open to you: The *Juſtice* of God, in reſpect to the *Sufferers* themſelves; and his *Wiſdom*, with regard to the great *Ends* and *Deſigns* he propoſed to himſelf in their Sufferings. III.

The *Juſtice* of God is *manifeſt*, in thus puniſhing *that* Race of Men, which *actually* ſpilt the Blood of *Chriſt*, and made themſelves, by a dire Imprecation, reſponſible for it. And as to the Conſequences of this Puniſhment on *their Children and Deſcendants*, it muſt be conſidered, that they reach only to thoſe of their Poſterity, who abet their Forefathers Crime, and continue in their Infidelity; for to thoſe of them, who abhor it, who acknowledge *Chriſt* to be the *Meſſiah*, entertain his Doctrine, and

SERM. V.

throw themſelves into the Arms of his Mercy, an Excluſion from the *Earthly Canaan*, and its Privileges can be thought no grievous Puniſhment, when that Loſs is ſo amply recompenſed by their gaining Admiſſion to *a better, an Heavenly Country*, even a Citizenſhip of that *new Jeruſalem, which is from above, and whoſe Builder is God.*

Heb. xi. 16.

Ver. 10.

And if the *Juſtice* of God be free from all Imputation in this great Event, his *Wiſdom*, I am ſure, is highly illuſtrated by it. For the Deſtruction of the *Jewiſh* Polity and Nation was ſo ordered by him, in all the Steps and Methods of its Accompliſhment, as to confirm the Truth, and ſpread the Intereſts of Chriſtianity.

Could there be a plainer, and more irrefragable Proof of the Divine Miſſion of our Lord, than the fulfilling of this Curſe on his Murderers? Who, that ſaw their wide Diſperſions, and ſad Sufferings, could forbear arguing after this manner? No Nation, from the Beginning of the World, was ever puniſhed

as

as this Nation; and therefore, if the Puniſhment of Nations be for their Sins, ſome Heinous Act muſt have been done by them, which never was done by any other Nation: And what could that be, but the Effuſion of the Blood of *Jeſus?* That Blood therefore, the Guilt of which purſues them, was the Blood of an Innocent Perſon, and not of an Impoſtor, the Seal of the Doctrine which he publiſhed, and the Evidence of his being what he affirmed himſelf to be, the *Son of God.* SERM. V.

Indeed this way of Reaſoning was ſo Obvious and Cogent, that many, even among the *Jews* themſelves, acknowledged the Force of it. And as for thoſe who obſtinately perſiſted in the Sin of their Forefathers, after *Jeruſalem* was deſtroyed, even they themſelves unwillingly contributed to the Advancement of Chriſtianity.

The Diſperſed *Jews* carried along with them into all Quarters of the Earth, the Oracles of God, thoſe Ancient Prophecies of their Nation, which deſcribed the

SERM. V. the Perſon and Character of the *Meſſiah*, foretold the Time of his Appearance, and the Circumſtances of his Death and Sufferings. And theſe Prophecies, when duly attended to, were ſufficient for the Conviction of any Men, who did not lie, as thoſe *Jews* did, under a Judicial Infatuation and Blindneſs. They were the great Enemies of the Goſpel, and yet the chief Promoters of it, by the Atteſtation which they gave to the Integrity of thoſe Books, from whence the Proof of its Divine Original was moſt clearly derived. A Teſtimony of unſuſpected Credit! ſince the *Jews* would not, if they could, have corrupted thoſe Books, in favour of *Chriſtians*; and could not have corrupted them, if they would, by reaſon of their manifold and wide Diſperſions. During which, God, I have ſaid, has kept them in a Separate State, not ſuffering them to incorporate with any other Nation, in order, by this means, to render the Triumphs of his Juſtice more conſpicuous, and in order alſo to preſerve them ready for that gracious Call, which, we piouſly believe,

believe, ſhall one Day ſummon them from all Parts of the Earth, *and gather together the Outcaſts of Iſrael.*—That ſo *We* and *They* may become *One Fold, under One Shepherd*, Chriſt the Righteous! *O the Depth of the Riches both of the Wiſdom and Knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways paſt finding out!* However,

SERM. V.

Rom. xi. 33.

Theſe we may humbly preſume to have been *ſome* of thoſe *Many* Wiſe Ends, to which Divine Providence directed this Wonderful Diſpenſation. *Others* might be added: But I forbear;—and ſhall chooſe rather to ſpend the remaining Part of my Time, in deducing (as I propoſed) from the Whole, ſome Uſeful and Concerning *Inferences.*

1. *His Blood be on Us, and on our Children!* and it happened to them, even according to their Wiſhes. Let us learn from hence, to abſtain from all ſuch raſh and horrid Imprecations, which the Ears of ſober Heathens would tingle at; but which are more unbecoming, and more heinous (as, I fear, they are more familiar)

in

SERM. V. in the Mouths of *Chriſtians*. For the Vengeance of God will find us out, not only for the Evil Deeds we commit, but for the profane Folly (ſo frequent among us) of wiſhing that Damnation to ourſelves, which we otherways but too well deſerve. They, who thus add to the Guilt of their Sins the binding Power of a Curſe, are doubly unpardonable; they conſent to their Puniſhment, as they before conſented to their Crime; and *their Damnation* therefore is every way *juſt*.

Matt. xii. 36. *Every Idle Word, that we ſpeak, we ſhall give an Account thereof at the Day of Judgment*, ſays our Saviour. How much more ſhall we be accountable for thoſe (not idle, empty Forms of Speech, but) ſolemn and ſignificant Imprecations, by which we anticipate our Judgment, and give Sentence againſt ourſelves. Let ſuch an Iniquity be far from all thoſe that name the Name of *Chriſt!* To whom Simplicity of Speech is as ſtrictly enjoined, as even Sincerity of Heart, or Integrity of Manners.

2. The

2. The Completion of this Curſe, and the Vengeance taken on that whole Nation, in conſequence of it, will lead us to admire the inſcrutable Methods of God's Providence, in bringing about the Salvation of Sinners. By the Scandal of the Croſs, and the ſeveral mean Circumſtances of our Saviour's Humiliation, the Wiſe, the Noble, and the Mighty Men of the Earth, were kept back from embracing the Faith of *Chriſt*. But that Prejudice againſt Chriſtianity ſoon turned to its Advantage: When they ſaw his Murderers puniſhed in ſo remarkable, and aſtoniſhing a manner; then they began to diſcern the ſurpaſſing *Dignity* of the Perſon ſuffering, and the Infinite *Merit* of his Sufferings; to diſcover ſome of the *Reaſons*, to admire the *Wiſdom*, and lay hold of the *Benefits* of that humble and myſterious Diſpenſation, *God manifeſt in the Fleſh*, dying on the Croſs, *to deſtroy the Works of the Devil.* SERM. V.

A Subject always highly deſerving, but on this Day more particularly challenging our devout Reflexions; which it will

SERM. V.

will to the utmoſt both exerciſe and improve. A Subject full of Wonders, not to be exhauſted! Inaſmuch as it contains the *Breadth, and Length, and Depth, and Height* (even the whole Extent and Compaſs) *of the Love of God towards Mankind in Chriſt Jeſus.*

Eph. iii. 18.

It is good for us to be here, to dwell on the Contemplation of this delightful, this amazing Myſtery; which even *Angels deſire to look into,* but cannot fully comprehend.

Let us determine, with St. *Paul*, to count every thing but *Droſs and Dung,* in compariſon of *the Excellency of this Knowledge of Chriſt crucified; to the Jews,* indeed, *a Stumbling Block, and to the Greeks Fooliſhneſs; but to thoſe who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Chriſt the Power of God, and Chriſt the Wiſdom of God.*

Phil. iii. 8.

1 Cor. i. 23.

3. It may be a third Improvement of what has been diſcourſed, if we take Occaſion from thence, to account for the Infidelity of thoſe Men, who live where the Goſpel of *Chriſt* is profeſſed, and yet ſhut

their

their Eyes againſt the Light of it. Can we wonder, this ſhould happen now and then to *particular* Perſons, when it is the Caſe of ſo great a *Body* of Men, as the *Jews*; ſuch a Nation of hardened Infidels, who though they have ſmarted under the Rod of *God*, during Sixteen Ages, for ſpilling the Blood, and rejecting the Doctrine of *Chriſt*, continue ſtill inſenſible, both of the Guilt of the One, and the Evidence of the Other? When ſuch an Effect happens, we muſt not impute it to any Sett of Natural, or Moral Cauſes; the Hand of God is in it, and ſome Degree of a Judicial Induration. Could we look to the Bottom of ſuch Men's Unbelief, we ſhould find, that it is generally owing to ſome high and flagrant Act of Wickedneſs, which provoked God to withdraw his Grace from them, after they had long reſiſted the Power of it, and leave them to walk in the Ways of their own Heart, and in the Sight of their own Eyes, without Check or Controul. And in ſuch a Caſe, though they may be Men of great Acuteneſs and Sagacity, in diſcerning

SERM. V.

SERM. V. cerning and purſuing the Advantages of this Life, as the *Jews* themſelves are: Yet, in reſpect of Divine Truth, they may be altogether inapprehenſive and ſtupid. *If the Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them which are loſt, in whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them which believe not, leſt the Light of the Glorious Goſpel of Chriſt, who is the Image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them.*

2 Cor. iv. 4.

4. The Reflexions which have been advanced, do alſo (in the fourth Place) ſuggeſt to us Matter of holy Caution and Fear. If the moſt beloved Nation on Earth, and choſen People of God; They, *to whom pertained the Adoption, and the Law, and the Covenants of God, and the Promiſes*; if *They* could ſin away all theſe Privileges, and utterly forfeit the Divine Protection and Favour, What Security have We, that, abuſing and deſpiſing the ſame Mercies, we ſhall not ſmart under the ſame Judgments? that *the Kingdom of God*, of which we are unworthy, *ſhall not be taken away from us, and given to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof?* The Inference

Rom. ix. 4.

Matt. xxi. 43.

ference is St. *Paul's!—Well!* (ſays he) *becauſe of Unbelief, they were broken off; and Thou ſtandeſt by Faith: Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God ſpared not the Natural Branches, take heed leſt he alſo ſpare not Thee.* SERM. V. Rom. xi. 20, 21.

In order therefore, to avoid their Fate, let us avoid any Reſemblance of their Guilt, and keep ourſelves at as great a Diſtance as we can from that Sin of the *Jews*, which drew theſe Calamities upon them, and in which even We, who live ſo long after it was committed, may yet be, to ſome Degree, involved; if we are profeſſed Enemies of Goodneſs, if we ſlander *Chriſt's* Word, blaſpheme his Perſon, and deſpiſe his Meſſengers; if we privately bring in dangerous Hereſies, deſtructive of Chriſtian Faith and Chriſtian Practice; for of ſuch Perſons St. *Peter* and St. *Paul* have pronounced, that *they deny the Lord who bought them, crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open Shame.* 2 Pet. ii. 1. Heb. vi. 6.

In order to ſtand clear of this Imputation, let it not be thought enough by us,

SERM. V. that we *do not* run into any of theſe Exceſſes ourſelves, while we abet, or connive at thoſe *who do:* But let us ſet ourſelves, in our ſeveral Places and Stations, to diſcountenance Infidelity, and to rebuke that Spirit of Profaneneſs, which hath for many Years paſt appeared open and bare-faced with Impunity (I had almoſt ſaid, with Applauſe) amongſt us, to the great Offence of ſober Minds, to the Prejudice of all good Order and Government, the Diſgrace of our Religion, and the Peril of Souls! It is high Time that theſe daring Attempts againſt the Honour of *Chriſt* and his Goſpel ſhould be effectually checked and ſuppreſſed, that the Civil Magiſtrate's Authority ſhould be employed, and the Spiritual Sword of Excommunication unſheathed againſt ſuch Impious Offenders.

Heb. x. 28, 29. *He that deſpiſed Moſes's Law, died without Mercy* (I ſpeak the Words of the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews*, and which are applied by him to this very purpoſe.) *Of how much ſorer Puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall They be thought worthy, who have trodden under Foot the Son of God, and have counted the Blood*

Blood of the Covenant, wherewith they were ſanctified, an unholy thing? SERM. V.

May the all-ſufficient Merit of that Blood though undervalued *by* them, be yet extended *to* them; purge their Conſciences from Dead Works, and enlighten their Minds with ſaving Knowledge! And if they will not repent, but reſolve ſtill to go on in their Impieties, let us be ſure to *have no Fellowſhip with* them, but *depart from the Tents of theſe wicked Men, leſt we be conſumed in their Sins!* Num. xvi. 26.

The Chriſtian State, a State of Suffering.

A

SERMON

Preached at

Weſtminſter-Abbey,

November 1, 1717.

Being *All-Saints Day.*

1 PET. ii. 21.

Even hereunto were ye called; becauſe Chriſt alſo ſuffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye ſhould follow his Steps.

THE Duty, and the Perfection of a *Chriſtian* conſiſts in the Imitation of *Chriſt*; in the Imitation of every Part of the Spotleſs Example, of the SERM. VI.

SERM. VI.

Paſſive as well as Active Graces, in which he abounded. Both Sides of his Character are highly uſeful and inſtructive to us; Both, at different Times, and for different Ends, alike neceſſary to be attentively conſidered, and cloſely followed by us. But *ſome* Occaſions, *ſome* Times there are, when that Part of *Chriſt's* Example, which relates to the ſad Sufferings he underwent, and the Heroic Manner in which he bore them, is principally to be regarded by *Chriſtians*. *Such* was the Seaſon, at which St. *Peter* wrote this Epiſtle to his Brethren of the Diſperſion, then every where oppreſſed, afflicted, perſecuted: And *ſuch* is this particular Day in the *Kalendar* of our Church; ſacred to the Memory of thoſe Saints, Confeſſors and Martyrs of old, who, being exerciſed in Afflictions, and trained up to Sufferings, *fought the good Fight, and finiſhed their Courſe*, and obtained the Crown, which was laid up for them by the Author and Finiſher of their Faith, the great Pattern and Rewarder of their Sufferings, *Chriſt Jeſus!*

2 Tim. iv. 7.

Even

Even hereunto they were called, and in this their Saintſhip chiefly conſiſted; the Imitation of *Him who ſuffered for Us, leaving Us an Example, that We ſhould follow his Steps.* SERM. VI.

The chief deſign of St. *Peter*, throughout this Epiſtle, is, to fortify the new Converts againſt thoſe Diſgraces and Afflictions, which had befallen, or were ready to befall them, on the Account of their Religion; and the Argument, by which he perſuades them here in the Text to Equanimity and Patience, is, we ſee, that *even hereunto they were called*; that they felt no more now, than what, from their very Entrance on Chriſtianity, they had reaſon to expect; that theſe were the Terms, on which they embraced the Faith; that ſuch Sufferings are the proper Lot and Portion of *Chriſtians*; *becauſe* (as he adds) *Chriſt alſo ſuffered for us, leaving us an Example that ye ſhould follow his Steps.* If *the Captain of our Salvation was made perfect through Sufferings*, how ſhould any Man who marches under his Enſigns, ever Heb. ii. 10.

SERM. VI. hope to exempt himſelf from them? He not only gave us Precepts, which we are to obey, but a Pattern alſo to direct, and facilitate our Obedience. They

1 John ii. 6. therefore, *who ſay, they abide in him, ought themſelves alſo to walk, even as he walked*; and conſequently (if the Will of God ſo be) to Suffer, as He Suffered, with a becoming Meekneſs and Patience, with Fortitude and Firmneſs: Eſpecially if it be conſidered, that He *Suffered for Us*, i. e. on our Account, and for our Advantage: And why then ſhould we think it hard and unreaſonable to Suffer for ourſelves? or be forward and uneaſy under any Affliction of Life that befalls us? He took out the Sting, and Expiated the Guilt of our Sins by his Sufferings; but ſo as to leave us ſtill under an Arrear of Puniſhment, which We ourſelves are to diſcharge, and, by that means (as

Col. i. 24. St. *Paul* emphatically ſpeaks) to *fill up what is behind of the Afflictions of Chriſt in our Fleſh. Even hereunto were We called; becauſe Chriſt alſo ſuffered for us, leaving us*

us an Example, that We ſhould follow his Steps. SERM. VI.

The Words, you ſee, will give me a proper Occaſion of explaining two great Truths, always fit to be inculcated to *Chriſtians*, and always preſent to the Minds, and exemplified in the Actions of thoſe Holy Men and Women, whom we this Day profeſs to Commemorate.

The two Points are theſe:

Firſt, That the *Chriſtian* State, however willing ſome *Chriſtians* may be to miſtake the Nature of it, is certainly *a State of Suffering*. I.

Secondly, That the Sufferings of *Chriſt* afford us a plain *Argument*, why *We* alſo ſhould expect our ſhare of Sufferings; and withal a powerful *Motive* to ſupport us under them. And II.

Firſt, I am to ſhew, that the *Chriſtian* State is a State of Suffering. I.

This

SERM. VI.

This is an hard Saying, which will not eaſily gain Admittance with the Great, the Rich, and the Proſperous; with thoſe who *are clothed in Purple and fine Linen, and fare ſumptuouſly every Day.* And yet, as unwelcome as the Doctrine may be, it is very clear and certain. We can ſcarce open a Page of the Goſpel, without finding it either laid down in the Expreſs Words of *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles, or recommended by their Practice, *Even hereunto are we called*, ſays St. *Peter* in the Text; *We are thereunto appointed*, Εις τοῦτο κείμεθα, ſays St. *Paul*, where he is profeſſedly treating of this Subject. And in another Place, *All that will live Godly in Chriſt Jeſus, ſhall ſuffer Perſecution.* And again, *We muſt, through much Tribulation, enter into the Kingdom of God.*

Luke xvi. 19.

1 Theſ. iii. 3.

2 Tim. iii. 12.

Acts xiv. 22.

'Tis true, theſe, and many other Paſſages of like Import in the *New Teſtament*, are chiefly, and in their utmoſt Extent, to be underſtood of the Times when they were firſt uttered, the Infant Age of Chriſtianity; when the Standard

of

of the Croſs being ſet up, all they, who re- SERM.
paired to it, were engaged in a continual VI.
Oppoſition to the Powers of this World;
and Perſecutions, Afflictions, Diſtreſſes
attended them in every Step of their Con-
flict; when the Sufferings of *Chriſtians*
were deſigned to promote the Reception
of the Faith of *Chriſt*, and the Seed of
the Word ſown was to be watered, and
made fruitful by the Blood of Martyrs.
Then indeed was it moſt remarkably,
moſt eminently true, that the *Chriſtian*
State and Profeſſion was a State of Suf-
fering. However, though this be not at
preſent the General Lot of *Chriſtians*,
although the Inſtances be now rare, in
which we are thus called upon to *wit-* 1 Tim. vi.
neſs a good Confeſſion, and to *reſiſt even* 13. Heb. xii.
to Blood; yet ſtill, I ſay, there *is* a Senſe 4.
of the Aſſertion in which it holds good,
and will hold good to the End of the
World; ſtill the Doctrine of the Goſpel
is Λόγος σταυροῦ, the Doctrine of the Croſs;
and He, who would be a true Diſciple of
Chriſt, muſt even now deny himſelf, and
take up his Croſs, and follow him.

Can

SERM. VI.

Can we doubt of this Truth, if we conſider the Solemn Engagements, into which we entered, when we were firſt liſted in his Service at our Baptiſm, That we would *manifeſtly fight under his Banner, againſt Sin, the World and the Devil, and continue Chriſt's faithful Soldiers and Servants to our Lives End?* Are theſe Enemies ſo weak, and contemptible, as that we ſhould hope to reſiſt them with Eaſe? Can this Combat be maintained, this Warfare be accompliſhed by us, without great Difficulties and Troubles?

The good *Chriſtian* is not *of this* World, even while he lives *in it*; and therefore the Man of this World, whoſe Life is not like his, whoſe Ways are of another Faſhion, will be ſure to malign, and traduce, and perhaps deſpiſe him. Becauſe *he runs not with them to the ſame Exceſs of Riot*, they will charge him with Affectation and Singularity at leaſt, if not with downright Hypocriſy; they will *daily miſtake his Sayings*, miſconſtrue all his beſt Actions, miſrepreſent his brighteſt

1 Pet. iv. 4.

brighteſt Virtues: His Humility and Lowlineſs of Mind ſhall be called Meanneſs of Spirit; his Patience under Injuries and Affronts, Inſenſibility and Folly; his Exactneſs in the Performance of Religious Duties, his Conſcientious Abſtinence from whatever has the Appearance of Evil, his holy Severities and Mortifications ſhall furniſh ample Matter for their ungodly Diſdain: *The Proud will have him exceedingly in Deriſion*; he *will be as a Tabret* unto them; *a By-word of the People, and the Song of the Drunkards.* SERM. VI. Pſ. cxix. 51. Job xvii. 6. Pſ. lxix. 12.

And can a Man ſo treated and vilified, be ſaid to be in an unſuffering State? I am ſure, theſe are reckoned among the bitter Ingredients of our Saviour's Sufferings; ſo that even where he is ſaid to have *endured the Croſs, and deſpiſed the Shame*, it is added alſo, in the next Verſe, that he *endured the Contradiction of Sinners*—As if that Circumſtance added ſome Degree of Weight and Sharpneſs to his Other Afflictions.

The

SERM. VI. The Sincere Chriſtian cannot deny or diſſemble the Truth, when a proper Occaſion bids him ſtand forth and own it; he cannot flatter *Wickedneſs in high Places*, fall in with falſe and prevailing Opinions, or *follow a Multitude to do Evil*; and He, who cannot bend himſelf to a Compliance in ſuch Caſes, muſt expect, not to continue unmoleſted, but to reap the proper Fruits of his Stubbornneſs. Or ſhould the Courſe of this World, in which he lives, run ſmoothly on; ſhould he be ruffled and diſcompoſed by no Enemies, no Accidents from without; yet ſtill there are Inward Anxities and Sorrows, Perplexities and Troubles, that attend him.

Rom. vii. 23. *He finds* (for St. *Paul* himſelf owns that he found) *a Law in his Members warring againſt the Law of his Mind, and bringing him*, or endeavouring to bring him, *into Captivity to the Law of Sin*. He has unruly Appetites to mortify, ſtrong Paſſions to tame: and the Struggle with theſe, even after they ſeem vanquiſhed, muſt ſometimes be renewed, and ſuch a

Struggle is no ways *Joyous, but Grievous.* SERM. VI.
The Fear he has of offending, keeps him under a perpetual Alarm; the Senſe he has of Guilt is quick and pungent, and ſubjects him, whenever he falls, to great Remorſe and Uneaſineſs. What Sighs, what Groans, what Floods of Tears does it occaſion? What Rigour, what Revenges on himſelf does it produce? How doth *his own Wickedneſs* (nay, how doth his very Errors and Infirmities) *correct him, and his Backſlidings reprove him?* Jer. ii. 19.

Or *could* we ſuppoſe him to have *no* Occaſion thus to ſuffer for his *Own* Sins, yet will he never want *one* of ſuffering for the Sins of *Others.* The good *Chriſtian* cannot be an unconcerned Spectator of any great Degree of Wickedneſs, even while he himſelf ſtands free from the Infection of it. His tender Regard for God's Honour, for the Intereſts of Piety, and the Good of Souls, makes him lay to heart the crying Iniquities of that People, amidſt whom he dwells, and grieve for thoſe, who do not

SERM. VI. not (and the rather, becauſe they do not) grieve for themſelves. When he obſerves the Scandalous Progreſs of Infidelity, the open Growth of Profaneneſs; the Emulation and Strife, the Oppreſſion and Injuſtice, the Hatred and Cruelty, that abound in the World through Luſt; in a word, when he ſees the moſt immoral Practices and Pollutions of the Heathens reigning among thoſe *who name the Name of Chriſt*, though *in their Works they deny him*; ſuch a Scene of Sin and Miſery wounds him to the Quick, and fills his Soul with unſpeakable Sorrow. *Rivers of Waters run down his Eyes, becauſe Men keep not God's Law.*

Pſ. cxix. 136.

'Tis true, his Mind is not always employed in this melancholy manner; he has alſo the Inward Joys and Conſolations, ariſing from the Teſtimony of a good Conſcience, from the Aſſurances of God's Favour, and the Refreſhing Influences of his good Spirit; but even *Theſe*, either for the Puniſhment of his Miſuſe of them, or for a Trial of his Faith,

Faith, are ſometimes withdrawn; and then his *Soul is ſorrowful even unto Death; Fearfulneſs and Trembling come upon him*, and *his Heart within him is even like melted Wax.* And this State of Dereliction is what the moſt Experienced Saints and Servants of God have felt, and complained of: And no wonder; ſince ſomething not unlike it happened even to the Son of God himſelf.

SERM. VI. Matth. xxvi. 38. Pſ. lv. 5. Pſ. xxii. 14.

Add to this that even the beſt of Men, and thoſe who are advanced neareſt toward Perfection, have often ſome peculiar Infirmity of Body or Mind, which ſticks cloſe to them, gives them great Interruptions in the Courſe of their Duty, and great Trouble and Uneaſineſs in the Performance of it; and this is permitted by God, in order to keep them Vigilant, Humble, Dependent; even to St. *Paul there was given a Thorn in the Fleſh, a Meſſenger of Satan to buffet him.* 2 Cor. xii. 7.

The *Chriſtian State* then (even ſetting aſide the Extraordinary Caſe of Perſecution for the Name of *Chriſt*) is certain-

SERM. VI.

ly a *State of Suffering*; *Hereunto are we called*, as many of us as have vowed Obedience to *Chriſt*, and profeſs to believe, and to live, as he hath taught us. And if ſo, let us all lay our Hands upon our Hearts, and examine ourſelves, whether, and how far we may be ſaid to be in ſuch a State, to have fulfilled the Duties, and undergone the Hardſhips, which entitle us to the Privileges of it.

Have we then lived according to the Fleſh, or according to the Spirit? Have we exerciſed ourſelves in the ſevere and rugged Parts of our Duty? or have we choſen for our Lot, the Gratifications of Senſe, and vain Pleaſures which did not profit us? Have we called ourſelves often to account for our Miſcarriages, and made a ſerious, a ſtrict, and impartial Scrutiny into our paſt Lives and Actions? Have we felt the Spirit of Compunction and Contrition moving in our Hearts, and condemning us for our Tranſgreſſions? Have we deplored them? Have we prayed, and ſtriven againſt

againſt them, and applied thoſe harſh, but wholeſome Remedies, which the Chriſtian Religion preſcribes for the Cure of ſuch Diſeaſes; Faſting, and Self-denial, and Mortification? Have we experienced the afflicting Hand of God, laying hold of us, when we tranſgreſſed, and gently leading us back into the Paths of Virtue, from whence we had ſwerved, by ſeaſonable and merciful Chaſtiſements? If this be our Caſe, we have ſome Reaſon to hope, that we are in ſuch a State and Condition of Mind, as becomes a good *Chriſtian*, ſuch as God will accept, and improve, and reward. SERM. VI.

But now, on the other ſide, what if the Vanities of Life, and the Enjoyments of Senſe have engroſſed all our Thoughts and Affections? What, if we have been ſo far from *crucifying* our Luſts, that we have *indulged* them to the utmoſt? from *mourning* for our Sins, that we have even *boaſted* of them? from humbling ourſelves in private, by *voluntary* Auſterities, that we have not

SERM. VI. regarded as we ought to do, even the *ſtated* Times of Public and Solemn Humiliations? What if our *Diverſions* have been purſued in prejudice to our *Devotions?* have taken up the *Room*, and eaten out the *Life* of them? Can ſuch Inclinations, ſuch Practices be reconciled to the Spirit of the Goſpel? Is this the Work, the Employment, *whereunto we are called?* Is this Temper of Mind agreeable to the Character of a Serious and Sincere *Chriſtian?*

Believe it, a Life of uninterrupted Jollity and Mirth, of perpetual Pleaſure and Amuſement, is not, cannot be the Life of a true Diſciple of *Chriſt.* Theſe things we may taſte, but we are not to reſt in them; they are our Refreſhments on the way, not the End and Deſign of our Journey. He that pretends to be a *Chriſtian indeed* (as St. *Paul* ſpeaks of *a Widow indeed) and liveth in Pleaſure, is dead while he liveth*; he *favoureth not the things that be of God,* hath no Reliſh of the Chief Duties and Offices of the Chriſtian Life; and though he may put

1 Tim. v. 6.

Matt. xvi. 23.

on ſome of the Outward *Forms* and Appearances of Godlineſs, is a Stranger to the Inward Life and *Power* of it. *That* is only to be attained by his fixing his Eye on the Example, and following the Steps of a Suffering, Crucified Saviour. And therefore, I ſhall, as I propoſed in the *next* place, SERM. VI.

II. *Secondly*, Conſider how the Sufferings of *Chriſt* afford us a *plain Argument*, why *We* alſo ſhould expect *Our Share* of Sufferings, and withal, *a powerful Motive* to ſupport us under them. And it is well they afford us *both* theſe; for the *one*, without the *other*, would be an Uncomfortable Conſideration.

The Apoſtle, we ſee, propoſes the Example of *Chriſt* on the *Suffering Side* of it; as if *that* were the *Chief* View we were to take of it, *that* tho great End and Deſign of his being made an Example to us. The moſt difficult Part of our Duty is to ſuffer well; and there-

SERM. VI.

fore we ſtood *moſt* in need of a Perfect Pattern in *this* reſpect, to direct and encourage us; and what we wanted *moſt*, *Chriſt*, who came to make good all our Defects, and to heal all our Infirmities, took *moſt* Care to ſupply us with; and therefore from his Birth throughout his Life, to his Death, this is the Character, under which he appears to us. His Sufferings indeed were finiſhed on the Croſs; but they began, when he firſt entered on his State of Humiliation; when emptying himſelf of all his Glory, *he took upon him to deliver Man*, and, in order to it, *did not abhor the Virgin's Womb.*

Under this View if we conſider him, and withal conſider, that 'tis our Duty, and our Happineſs to reſemble him; what Hopes can we have to eſcape the Sufferings of this Life? Nay what Reaſon totally to decline them? How can we poſſibly, *without Suffering*, be like Him, who himſelf *did nothing but ſuffer?*

The Infinite Dignity of his Perſon (for he was the Son of God, and God the Son) hindered him not from taking

ing our Nature upon him, with all its meaneſt Circumſtances, and with all its moſt afflicting Accidents: and who is there then among the Sons of Men, ſo diſtinguiſhed from the reſt by his Greatneſs, or Pre-eminence, as that it ſhould miſbecome him to learn this great Leſſon of Humility? Who, that ſhould be aſhamed to practiſe it? SERM. VI.

He was of unblemiſhed Purity, of perfect Sanctity and Innocence; and therefore the Calamities he underwent, were no ways neceſſary, either for the Trial or Improvement of his Virtue; and yet he choſe to undergo them. How then ſhould the very Beſt of us (who ought, God knows, to be much Better, and yet, without ſuch Tryals, are in danger of growing much Worſe, than we are) expect or even deſire to be free from them?

Certainly we judge not aright of our Spiritual Wants and Neceſſities, of our Carnal Infirmities and Failures, if we wiſh to live always in perfect Eaſe, and think it a Mark of God's Favour, when nothing happens to deject, or diſturb us.

SERM. VI. Nay, but *then* is the Time, when we have *moſt* Reaſon to ſuſpect ourſelves. There is a *Wo*, we know, denounced on *Chriſtians, when all Men ſhall ſpeak well of them*; for ſo did they not of *Chriſt* himſelf; *and we are predeſtinate to be conformed to his Image*; and therefore, as far as we deviate from that Original, ſo far we fall ſhort of Perfection and Happineſs. *If we endure Chaſtning, God dealeth with us as Sons*; even as he dealt with him, of whom he ſaid; *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleaſed.*

Luke vi. 20. Rom. viii. 29. Heb. xii. 7. Matt. iii. 17.

1 Pet. iv. 1. *Foraſmuch then as Chriſt hath ſuffered for us in the Fleſh, let us arm ourſelves with the ſame Mind*; with a Reſolution to imitate him in his perfect Submiſſion and Reſignation of himſelf to the Divine Will and Pleaſure; in his Contempt of all the Enjoyments of Senſe, of all the Vanities of this World, its Allurements and Terrors; in his Practice of Religious Severities; in his Love of Religious Retirement; in his making it his *Meat* and his *Drink*, his only Study and Delight, to *work the Work of him that ſent him*; in

Joh. ix. 4.

his

his chooſing, for that End *(when* that End could not otherwiſe be attained) Want before Abundance, Shame before Honour, Pain before Pleaſure, Death before Life; and in his preferring *always* a laborious uninterrupted Practice of Virtue, to a Life of Reſt, and Eaſe, and Indolence. *Let the ſame Mind,* in all theſe reſpects, *be in us, which was in Chriſt Jeſus, who ſuffered for us, leaving us an Example, that we ſhould follow his Steps.* The Taſk indeed is hard to Fleſh and Blood; the Difficulties that lie in our Way, are exceeding great, and would be altogether inſuperable, had not He, who ſet us an Example, ſo far above the Level and Pitch of human Nature, enabled, as well as commanded us to follow it.

SERM. VI.

But, Thanks be to God, *That* is not our Caſe. *Chriſt,* by the Merit of thoſe *very Sufferings,* which he propoſes to our Imitation, has purchaſed for us all ſuch Extraordinary Aids and Aſſiſtances, as are requiſite to ſupport us under them. By what he underwent for our Sakes in his Life, and at his Death, he obtained of God,

SERM. VI. God, not only a Releaſe from the Puniſhment of our Sins, but new Powers to qualify us for a further Increaſe in Virtue; not only the Pardoning, but Sanctifying Grace of his Spirit; by the Means of which we

Gal. v. 24. can now *crucify the Fleſh, with the Affections and Luſts*; mortify and ſubdue all our irregular Paſſions, undervalue Pleaſures, rejoice in Afflictions, and *walk even as he walked*, in Humility and Patience, in Purity and Holineſs. Weak and Im-

2 Cor. xii. 9. potent we are, but *his Grace is ſufficient for us:* We can do nothing of ourſelves,

Phil. iv. 13. but *We can do all things through Chriſt that ſtrengtheneth us*; and, in Confidence of this Aſſiſtance, we may venture to take to ourſelves the Words of his fervent

Rom. viii. 35. Apoſtle, and ſay, *Who ſhall ſeparate us from the Love of Chriſt?* Who, or what ſhall hinder us from obeying his Precepts,

Ver. 37. and from tranſcribing his Practice? *Shall Tribulation, or Diſtreſs, or Perſecution, or Famine, or Nakedneſs, or Peril, or Sword? Nay, but in all theſe things we are more than Conquerors, through Chriſt that loved us.*

If

SERM. VI.

If I am lifted up from the Earth (ſaid he, ſpeaking of the powerful Efficacy of his Croſs and Sufferings) *I will draw all Men after me:* I will lift *them* alſo up above their earthly Affections and Purſuits, and raiſe them into the Participation of a Divine and Heavenly Nature.—Look down then upon us from thy Croſs, Bleſſed *Jeſu! Draw us,* and *we will run after thee,* not only with willing, but Chearful Minds; with Alacrity, and with Pleaſure. We will trace all thy Steps from *Bethlehem* to *Calvary*; we will imitate thee, to the beſt of our Power, in all the Stages and Conditions of thy Life, in what thou didſt, and in what thou ſufferedſt; we will ſet thee before us in every Caſe, and ſay, Would my Saviour have thus, or thus behaved himſelf in theſe Circumſtances? Would he have yielded to ſuch a Temptation? or declined ſuch a Conflict? Would he have reſented ſuch an Injury; or felt the leaſt Diſcompoſure of Mind, upon ſuch an Affront? Would he have been elated upon ſuch a Succeſs; have ſunk under ſuch a Preſſure; or conſulted with Fleſh

John xiii. 32.

Cant. i. 4.

SERM. VI. Fleſh and Blood on ſuch an Occaſion? Why then ſhould I, who have his Example to guide, his Promiſe of an exceeding Reward to encourage, and his Grace to ſuſtain me? Nay, but *draw us*, Bleſſed Jeſu, and *we will run after thee! we will follow thee*, O thou Lamb of God, *whitherſoever thou goeſt!* Particularly we will often reſort to that lively affecting Repreſentation of thy Death and Sufferings, the Sacrament of thy Body and Blood, which thou haſt inſtituted for us. *There* we will inure ourſelves to the Contemplation of *Chriſt* crucified, and to the Contempt of all the vain Glories of this World, which were, together with thee, nailed to thy Croſs; of all the bewitching, but empty Pleaſures of Life, with which we are ſurrounded. *There* we will endeavour to inſtruct ourſelves in thoſe holy Leſſons of Reſignation, Humility, Patience, and Perſeverance unto Death, which thou, in thy Goſpel, haſt taught us; and to furniſh ourſelves with ſuch Spiritual Supplies of Grace, as may enable us to trace the ſuffering Example, which thou haſt ſet us;

that

that ſo reſembling thee in Meekneſs, Piety, and Purity *here*, we may alſo reſemble thee in Happineſs and Glory *hereafter!* SERM. VI.

Now unto him that loved us, and waſhed us from our Sins in his own Blood, and hath made us Kings and Prieſts unto God, and his Father; to Him be all Glory and Honour aſcribed in all Aſſemblies of the Saints! Amen. Rev. i. 5, 6.

Some

Some Reaſons aſſigned for our Saviour's appearing chiefly *to his Apoſtles after his Reſurrection; and his Manner of converſing with them, repreſented:*

IN A

SERMON

Preached at

Weſtminſter-Abbey,

On *Eaſter-Day*, 1718.

ACTS i. 3.

To whom alſo he ſhewed himſelf alive after his Paſſion by many infallible Proofs, being ſeen of them forty Days, and ſpeaking of the Things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

THIS a juſt Obſervation of St. *Chryſoſtom*, that, though the Apoſtles were allowed to be preſent with our Lord, SERM. VII.

SERM. VII.

Lord, and to behold him, when aſcending up into Heaven, yet they were not permitted to ſee him in the Act of ariſing from the Dead; becauſe their Teſtimony was requiſite in the one Caſe, to eſtabliſh our Faith, but not in the other. It was fit they ſhould be Eye-witneſſes of his Aſcent; elſe, they had not been able to atteſt the Truth of that Matter of Fact, the Knowledge of which they could not afterwards have attained otherwiſe than by Revelation; but it was no ways neceſſary that they ſhould ſee him, when he broke looſe from the *Grave*, in order to their bearing witneſs of his Reſurrection; ſince it was ſufficient to that Purpoſe, if they ſaw, and converſed with him, *after* he was riſen. And that they did ſo, all the Evangeliſts inform us, particularly St. *Luke*, in the Words of the Text, *To whom alſo* [i. e. *unto the Apoſtles, whom he had choſen*, which are the concluding Words of the next preceding Verſe] *he ſhewed himſelf alive after his Paſſion by many infallible Proofs, being ſeen of them forty Days, and ſpeaking*

ſpeaking of the Things pertaining to the King-dom of God. SERM. VII.

The Obſervations I intend to ſuggeſt from theſe Words, may be reduced under the three following Heads:

Firſt, Our Saviour's continuing forty Days upon Earth, after he aroſe. I.

Secondly, His appearing throughout that time *chiefly* to his Apoſtles. And, II.

Thirdly, The Manner of his ſpending his Time with them. Two Accounts are given of it in the Text; That by *many infallible Proofs* he convinced them of his being returned to Life, and that he diſcourſed to them of *things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.* III.

The *Firſt* Point that may deſerve your Attention is, our Saviour's Continuance upon Earth for forty Days after he aroſe. I.

That he did ſo continue, is certain; and as certain, that, for many wiſe Reaſons, known to God alone, and as un-

SERM. VII.

neceſſary, as they are impoſſible to be by us diſcovered, it was requiſite that he ſhould ſo continue: but thoſe, which the Scripture hath pointed out to us, we may warrantably aſſign. And from thence it appears, that his Stay here upon Earth, after his Reſurrection, was intended for the Good of his Church, which he was about to eſtabliſh, and for the Inſtruction of his Apoſtles in all things relating to the great Work, in which he was about to employ them.

They doubted of the Truth of his Reſurrection; and therefore he ſtayed to give them ſuch convincing Proofs, and Aſſurances of it, as might enable them to convince others, and become Authentic Witneſſes of that great Matter of Fact, upon which, as upon a chief Corner Stone, the whole Frame of his Religion was to be founded.

They laboured under great Prejudices, in relation to his Character and Sufferings, and expected that, by Him, the Kingdom ſhould have been reſtored to *Iſrael*. Theſe Prejudices he himſelf reſolved

reſolved to remove, and diſpel; to inform them of the Spiritual Nature of his Kingdom, of the Ends for which, and the Methods by which, it was to be erected and propagated. SERM. VII.

Sorrow had overwhelmed their Hearts upon the Loſs of him; and therefore, upon his return to Life, he ſtayed ſome time with them, to comfort and chear them. They were, by Degrees, to be Weaned from their Fondneſs for his Perſon, and their Deſire of his Bodily Preſence; and to this end it was requiſite that he ſhould not withdraw himſelf from their Sight at once, but appear, and diſappear to them at fit Intervals; diſcontinuing, and reſuming his Converſation with them in ſuch a manner, as might beſt diſpoſe them to be willing entirely to part with him.

He was leiſurely to ſatisfy them, that it was *expedient for him to go away*, ſince *if he went not away, the Comforter would not come; but if he departed, he would ſend him unto them*; and that *when He, the Spirit of Truth, was come, he would* John xvi. 7. John xvi. 13.

SERM. VII.

guide them into all Truth, bring all things to their Remembrance, and ſhew them things to come; would impart to them all Spiritual Powers, Gifts, and Graces, and fill them with all Conſolation and Joy in believing, and, by that means, make an Amends to them for his own Bodily Abſence. For the Reception of this Comforter, for the Entertainment of this Heavenly Gueſt he was to prepare, and qualify them, that, when he arrived, he might find them meet to be Partakers of his bleſſed Influences and Illuminations.

Theſe Accounts of our Saviour's Continuance upon Earth for ſome time after he aroſe, are plainly enough aſſerted, or intimated in holy Writ; and therefore we may build upon them with Aſſurance. And may we not alſo, without Preſumption, although with leſs Certainty, venture to ſay, That he intended, by this means, to add one yet further Proof to thoſe he had already given, of his exceeding Love to his Spouſe, the Church, of his great and diſintereſted

Concern

Concern for the Good of Souls? For though, from the Moment of his Reſurrection, he was entitled to that Glory, which his Humiliation had purchaſed, yet would he not immediately enter into it: He ſnatched not at the Reward, the high Reward of his Sufferings, with Eagerneſs and Haſte; but delayed for ſome time his ſolemn Inauguration to the Regal Office; his taking Poſſeſſion of the Joys of Heaven, and ſitting on the Right Hand of God, while there was any thing yet left undone for his Church, and his Work, which it was requiſite for him to tranſact here in Perſon. A noble Inſtance of Self-denial! which ſeems to have wrought mightily in his Apoſtles, and to have produced excellent Fruits; particularly in St. *Paul*, who, though he earneſtly deſired to be *abſent from the Body, and preſent with the Lord, to depart and be with Chriſt*; yet, for the Sake of his Flock here below, repreſſed thoſe Deſires, and was contented to want, what he ſo earneſtly longed after: *To abide in the Fleſh* (ſaid he to

SERM. VII.

Phil. i. 24.

SERM. VII. to them) *is more needful for You*; and on that Account, and that only, he choſe to abide in it.

Expedient therefore it was for the Diſciples of *Chriſt*, that he ſhould tarry *ſome time* with them after he aroſe: And *that* time was, it ſeems, *forty Days*; a Circumſtance, not to be neglected by us, ſince the Pen of St. *Luke* hath thought fit to record it; probably, for this Reaſon,—Becauſe *Moſes*, and *Elijah*, the Types of *Chriſt*, on two very ſolemn Occaſions, and *Chriſt* himſelf, juſt before he publicly exerciſed his Miniſtry, had, for the ſame Number of Days, retired into the Wilderneſs. Our Lord therefore having, in Conformity with theſe Types, taken forty Days to prepare himſelf for the Diſcharge of his Prophetic Offices on Earth, did in like manner retire, as it were, and ſeparate himſelf for forty Days alſo, ere he entered upon his Regal and Mediatorial Offices in Heaven, and there ſat at the Right-hand of Power, making Interceſſion to God for us.

But

But I proceed to what I have to offer to you on the SERM. VII.

Second Particular, Our Saviour's appearing, throughout this time, *chiefly* to his Apoſtles.

There are indeed two Inſtances of his appearing to others than the Apoſtles, *i. e.* to the Women at the Sepulchre, and to the Five hundred Brethren mentioned by St. *Paul:* To which ſome add a third, his appearing to two Diſciples on the way toward *Emmaus:* The Relation of St. *Luke* (as they apprehend) leaving it doubtful, whether theſe were of the Number of the Eleven, or only Diſciples at large. But theſe Inſtances were rare, and little Streſs therefore is laid upon them by the holy Writers; who generally place the whole Proof of the Reſurrection of *Chriſt*, upon the Apoſtles Teſtimony, becauſe they ſaw him moſt frequently, and converſed moſt familiarly with him: And therefore he is ſaid here, by St. *Luke*, to have *ſhewed himſelf alive to the Apoſtles whom* Acts x. 40, 41.

SERM. VII.

whom he had choſen; and by St. *Peter*, to have *ſhewed himſelf openly, not to all the People, but unto Witneſſes choſen before of God, even to Us* [i. e. to Us, the Apoſtles] *who did eat and drink with him after he aroſe from the Dead.*

Now the Reaſons of his appearing *chiefly* to the Apoſtles, are manifeſt: They have been already, in ſome meaſure, ſuggeſted; and there may be Occaſion, in what follows, further to explain them. But, why he appeared not to *Others*, beſides the Apoſtles, why not to ſuch as were averſe to his Perſon and Doctrine, to the *Sanhedrim* itſelf, or even *to all the People*, the whole Body of the *Jews* then aſſembled at the Paſſover, is a Queſtion, that may ſeem to require and deſerve a particular Anſwer: Since Infidelity on this Head finds room to object, That the moſt effectual Way of proving his *Reſurrection*, had been, to have made his *Enemies* his *Witneſſes*; whereas our Saviour manifeſted himſelf only to his *Friends* and *Followers*.

He

He did ſo; and with very good Rea- SERM.
ſon. For, VII.

1. It was no ways fit, that ſuch a Favour ſhould be indulged to his Murderers; to thoſe, who had treated this Meſſenger, and his Meſſage, with Scorn and Blaſphemy, had reſiſted the Evidence of all his Miracles, and, notwithſtanding the Sanctity of his Life and Doctrine, had purſued him to his Croſs with ſuch a Complication of Obſtinacy, Malice, and Cruelty, as can, in no other Inſtance, be paralleled. Had *Chriſt* appeared, after he aroſe, to [illegible]n of ſo flagitious a Character, his Conduct, in that Caſe, would have been ſo far from promoting the Intereſts of his Goſpel (which is the Doctrine of Holineſs) that it would have given a great, and dangerous Encouragement to Wickedneſs, to Men's *continuing* and abounding *in Sin, that ſo Grace might abound.* So far was our Lord from being obliged to afford thoſe who crucified him, ſuch an extraordinary Proof of his Reſurrection, that he might, with great Juſtice, have denied them any Evidence at all of it,

SERM. VII. it, and not have ſuffered even the Teſtimony of his Apoſtles concerning it to have reached them. But,

2. The only Reaſon aſſignable, why God ſhould have tried ſuch an Experiment as this, is, a Probability of converting the whole *Jewiſh* Nation by the Means of it. But Experience, on our Lord's expreſs Deciſion in the Caſe, aſſure us, that this End would not have been attained by it. Had he appeared at Mid-day *to all the People*, yet *all the People* would not have believed in him. The ſincere and honeſt-hearted *Jews* would have ſurrendered to ſuch an Evidence, as they did afterwards to that which was given by the Apoſtles; but the malicious and obſtinate would have found out Colours and Excuſes, to evade the Force of it. What! (might one of them have ſaid) though there has been an Apparition in the Likeneſs of *Jeſus*, whom we crucified, muſt we neceſſarily from thence conclude, that he is really alive? No ſuch matter! This is no new thing; Sorcery hath often effected it: *Samuel* was dead, and in his Grave,

1 Sam. xxviii. 14.

Grave, even then, when the Witch of *Endor* made his Likeneſs appear before *Saul*. Thus would they have reaſoned againſt their own Reaſon, and their very Senſes, and have kept their Infidelity, in ſpite of ſuch a Demonſtration; according to that Saying of our Lord, which he uttered, not perhaps without an Eye to this very Suppoſition: *If they hear not* Moſes *and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe* (and appeared to them) *from the Dead.* SERM. VII. Luke xvi. 31.

In Fact, the Reſurrection of *Lazarus*, and their converſing with him afterwards had not convinced them; and we may be ſure, that they, who could impute this great Miracle, and the others wrought by our Saviour, while alive, to the Power of Magic, and a Confederacy with *Beelzebub*, would have found out a Way of arguing themſelves out of the Certainty of our Lord's Reſurrection, though they themſelves had had an Ocular Aſſurance concerning it. However,

3. Should we ſuppoſe, that ſuch a glaring Proof of his Reſurrection could not have

SERM. VII.

have been reſiſted by them, yet it ought not to have been indulged to them for this very Reaſon; becauſe it was *irreſiſtible*. God never intended to *compel*, but only to *perſuade*, us into a Reception of Divine Truth; and we are properly ſaid to be perſuaded, when we cloſe with ſuch Motives and Arguments as are ſufficient indeed to convince us, but ſuch however, by which we need not be convinced, unleſs we pleaſe. All beyond this is Force, not Perſuaſion; and is very unfit therefore to be applied to Creatures endued with Liberty and Reaſon, and who are to be rewarded, or puniſhed, according as they employ it. The Belief of the Goſpel was deſigned to be the Teſt of ſincere and ingenuous Minds, and as ſuch, was to be attended with mighty Bleſſings and Benefits; for *bleſſed are they which have not ſeen, and yet have believed.* But what Reaſon, what room is there for bleſſing thoſe, who ſhall on that Account alone *believe* the Goſpel, becauſe they are ſurrounded every Way with ſo much Light and Conviction, that it is abſolutely impoſſible

John xx. 29.

poſſible for them *not* to believe it? Such a Faith can have no Degree of Deſert in it, and is therefore abſolutely incapable of any Reward. SERM. VII.

The true Queſtion in this Caſe is, Whether the Proof of *Chriſt's* Reſurrection, by the Teſtimony of the Apoſtles, be not ſatisfactory and full, abundantly full to all the Purpoſes of Conviction? If it be, are we not very unreaſonable, and abſurd in complaining, that a Fact was not atteſted with ten times more Evidence than was needful? *Nay, but who art thou, O Man, who,* whilſt thou acknowledgeſt the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God to be ſufficiently juſtified in his own Method, wilt yet preſcribe to him the Uſe of thine, becauſe it ſeems to thee more fit and convenient? At this rate, how many things are there, which we (full of our own Wiſdom and Schemes) ſhould think fit to have been done, which yet God hath not thought fit to do for us? We perhaps may think it very convenient, that we ſhould at firſt have been made impeccable,

SERM. VII.

cable, and ſecured from falling: We, upon a view of the ſeveral Hereſies that have ſprung from the Miſinterpretation of Holy Writ, may judge, it would have been much better for the Church, if the Scripture had been ſo clear in every Point, that no well-meaning Man could have miſtaken the Senſe of it: at leaſt, we might be apt to imagine it highly expedient, that God ſhould have appointed ſome Infallible Judge, to whom we might have reſorted for the clearing up of all Difficulties, and ending all Controverſies. But in all theſe Caſes *the Wiſdom of Man is Foolishneſs with God*; for he hath ordered things quite otherwiſe. He placed us indeed in ſuch a State at firſt, from which we could not fall, without the uttermoſt Folly and Weakneſs; but from which however fall we did, as ſoon almoſt as we were poſſeſſed of that Happineſs. He gave us a Rule of Faith and Manners, eaſy enough to be underſtood by honeſt humble Minds; but capable of being ſtrained, perverted, and abuſed to ill

1 Cor. iii. 19.

Purpoſes

Purpoſes by proud opinionative Readers. He left every Man to judge for himſelf in Matters of Religion; and yet ſo, as to leave him without Excuſe alſo, if he made an ill Uſe of that Judgment. And in like manner hath he dealt with us, in relation to thoſe great Matters of Fact, upon which the Truth of our Religion is founded: He hath built the Belief of them upon ſuch Proofs, as cannot fail of convincing thoſe, who are ſincere, and willing to be informed; and yet ſuch as leave room for little Exceptions and Cavils to Men of perverſe and diſputative Tempers, who will not allow of any Evidence, in behalf of Chriſtianity, how ſtrong and irrefragable ſoever, if they can but imagine to themſelves any Circumſtance, whereby it might poſſibly have been made yet ſomewhat ſtronger; and do, therefore, pretend to doubt of the Truth of *Chriſt's* Reſurrection, becauſe he did not appear *to all the People*, to his very Perſecutors and Murderers, I have proved, that it was highly improper, unneceſſary, and

SERM. VII.

SERM. VII. unreaſonable, that he ſhould ſo have appeared; and that it was expedient, highly expedient (becauſe in all reſpects ſufficient) that he ſhould appear only to his Friends and Followers, and, amongſt them, *chiefly* to his Apoſtles, upon the ſingle Credit of whoſe Teſtimony the Belief of this great Article was to depend. It remains that I ſhould, in the

III. *Third* and laſt place, conſider, How our Saviour ſpent his time with them.

The Text tells us, that he employed it, partly in giving them *many infallible Proofs* of his being returned to Life, and partly in diſcourſing *to them of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*. By the *one* he enabled them to prove the Divine Authority of his Miſſion, and by the *other* he inſtructed them in all the Parts of his heavenly Doctrine, and by *both* together he qualified them for a ſucceſsful Propagation of Chriſtianity.

1. He ſhewed himſelf alive *to them* ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, by many clear Signs and

and Tokens, *many infallible Proofs* (as our Tranſlation renders it.) And ſuch indeed they were in every reſpect. For he appeared to them, not *once* only, but *often*; not only to *ſome* of them, when ſeparated from the reſt, but to *all* of them, when aſſembled together, and when they were capable of ſatisfying each other by Enquiries made at the ſame time into the Truth of the ſame Fact, and conſequently of giving an united Teſtimony to it. He appeared to them not in the Dark, as Spectres do, but in broad Day-light; ſometimes at Places where he had before appointed to meet them, ſometimes occaſionally, as they were travelling on the Way, or ſitting at Meat, when their Minds were freeſt from the Clouds of Melancholy, and their Imaginations leaſt apt to be impoſed upon. He converſed with them at ſuch times in the moſt eaſy and familiar Manner: He eat and drank with them, and gave them, by that means, Leiſure to recover themſelves from that Surpriſe, and thoſe Fears, which the firſt

SERM. VII.

SERM. VII. Sight of him might occaſion, and with compoſed Minds to hearken to all he ſhould ſay to them. He not only repeated theſe Converſations often, he continued them long; as appears from the Subject of ſome of them, particularly of That, where he is ſaid to have *begun at Moſes, and all the Prophets, and to have expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himſelf.* And, that nothing might be wanting to ſatisfy them to the uttermoſt, he was contented, not only to be ſeen and heard, but even handled by them: *Reach hither*, ſaid he to one of them in the Preſence of the reſt, *thy Finger, and behold my Hands, and reach hither thy Hand, and thruſt it into my Side, and be not faithleſs, but believing.* Is it poſſible for Scepticiſm itſelf to indulge its wild Suſpicions ſo far, as to think, the Apoſtles might all this time be in a Dream, or under a ſtrong and continued Deluſion? They who think, or ſpeak thus, ſeem to be under a Judicial Infatuation themſelves: For they might, with as much Probability and Colour of Rea-

Luke xxiv. 27.

John xx. 27.

ſon, affirm, that all the Facts, recorded in the graveſt and moſt authentic Writers, are Figments, and the mere Inventions of wanton Pens: That there is no way of diſtinguiſhing between Reality and Appearance, even in the common Occurrences of Life, and conſequently no Difference between a Romance and an Hiſtory. Certain it is, that, unleſs the Apoſtles be admitted as good Witneſſes in ſuch a Caſe as this, and the Truth of what they relate be allowed, there is an End of the Credibility of all Human Teſtimony. SERM. VII.

2. But as our Saviour, during his forty Days Stay on Earth, fully enabled his Apoſtles to atteſt his Reſurrection, ſo did he qualify them duly to preach his Doctrine; for he taught them τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, *the Things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*, i. e. to the Goſpel Diſpenſation, of which they were to be the Miniſters, and to his Church, which they were to gather, conſtitute, and govern. Of theſe things the Apoſtles were then very ignorant; and though for their full and final Inſtruction, our Lord refer-

SERM. VII.

red them to the Comforter, yet he himſelf was willing previouſly to inſtruct and comfort them; to teach them the firſt Rudiments of Chriſtian Knowledge, and to fill their Hearts with longing Expectations of thoſe further Degrees of Light and Joy, with which they were afterwards to be bleſſed. This Promiſe he had made them the very Night before his Paſſion. *I will not leave you comfortleſs*, ſaid he, even for ſo long a time, as till the promiſed Comforter ſhall come; *I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the World ſeeth me no more; but ye ſee me.—At that Day* (the Day of my Return to you) *You ſhall know that I am in my Father, and You in Me.* Ye ſhall underſtand ſomewhat of that Myſtical Union that is between my Father and Me, and between Me and my Church, the Society of Chriſtian Believers. Without all Queſtion, what he then promiſed, he now performed; and therefore, we may be ſure, diſcourſed to them concerning the great Articles of our Faith, the high Myſteries of Chriſtianity.

John xiv. 18, &c.

The

The Scripture Accounts of theſe things are ſhort: However, even from theſe ſhort Accounts we learn, that he commanded them to make Proſelytes in all Nations, and to *baptize them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt:* And we cannot doubt but that, when he directed this Form, he made ſome Diſcovery to them concerning the Nature and Offices of theſe Three Perſons of the ever bleſſed Trinity, in whoſe Names they were to baptize. SERM. VII. Matth. xxviii. 19.

He told them, that *all Power was given him, in Heaven, and in Earth*; and in virtue of that Power, he gave them alſo Power, not of baptizing only, but of remitting and retaining Sins. He *ſent them, as he was ſent by the Father*; and ſufficiently directed them to ſend others, as they were ſent, who were, in like manner, to continue that Miſſion, by the Promiſe he made to *be with them always, even to the End of the World.* Matth. xxviii. 18. Matth. xxviii. 20.

The Sacrament of his Body and Blood he had inſtituted, while living; and now therefore he celebrated it together with

SERM. VII.

them: *For he took Bread, and bleſſed it, and brake it, and gave unto them, and was known of them in* thus *breaking of Bread:* a Phraſe, which in the *Acts* manifeſtly refers to the Euchariſt; and may juſtly therefore be underſtood of it here, in the Story of our Saviour.

Luke xxiv. 30, 35.

Matth. xxviii. 20.

In a word, *he opened their Underſtandings, that they might underſtand the Scriptures, and all the Prophecies concerning himſelf*; and he bad them *teach all Nations to obſerve all things that he had commanded them:* Which two Paſſages comprize the Knowledge of what relates both to the Doctrine and Diſcipline of the Church, both to the Faith and Practice of a *Chriſtian*.

But the chief Way of our Saviour's ſpending his Time with the Apoſtles, after he aroſe from the Dead, was, by affording them theſe Illuſtrious, theſe Infallible Proofs of the Truth of his Reſurrection. And God be thanked that he did ſo! ſince by thus ſettling his wavering Diſciples in an unſhaken Belief of this Truth, he enabled them, with the utmoſt Firmneſs and Conſtancy, to propagate their Belief of it,

and

and even to ſeal their Teſtimony with their Blood; and hath by that means extended the Efficacy and Influence of thoſe Infallible Proofs to *us* alſo, who live near Seventeen Ages, after they were given. *Our* Conviction depended upon *Theirs*, is derived from it, and proportioned to it. And in virtue therefore of the Evidence indulged to them (not for their Sakes alone, but for the Sake of all ſucceeding *Chriſtians*) do we meet here this Day, with Joy and Thankfulneſs to celebrate this Feſtival, and to profeſs our Faith in Him, that *was dead, but is alive*; *was crucified, but is riſen*; *and now ſitteth at the Right-hand of the Father.* SERM. VII.

Bleſſed indeed, in many Reſpects, beyond us, bleſſed were the Eyes that ſaw theſe Things, and the Ears that heard them, for they ſaw, and heard, and believed; but bleſſed alſo are *We*, who receive their Teſtimony, bleſſed even beyond them, in this reſpect, if *not ſeeing we do yet believe.* The Lips of Truth have aſſured us, that in this Caſe there is one Beatitude more reſerved for Us, than be-

SERM. VII.

longed even to the Apoſtles themſelves, if we believe the Reſurrection of *Chriſt* upon their Report; whereas They believed it only, upon the Teſtimony of their Senſes. —Having therefore theſe Promiſes, dearly beloved, wait with Patience, *that the Trial of your Faith* (as St. *Peter* ſpeaks) *may be found unto Praiſe and Honour and Glory at the appearing of Jeſus Chriſt! whom having not ſeen,* I truſt, *ye love; in whom, though now ye ſee him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with Joy unſpeakable, and full of Glory; receiving,* in his due time, *the End of your Faith, even the Salvation of your Souls.*

1 Pet. i. 7, 8.

And may the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in believing, that you may abound in Hope, through the Power of the Holy Ghoſt.

Rom. xv. 13.

I cannot diſmiſs this Reflexion, without applying it to the bleſſed Sacrament, of which we are going to partake, and by partaking of which, we profeſs, in a moſt eſpecial Manner, to exerciſe our Faith in an inviſible *Jeſus*. He is there really, effectually, though Spiritually, preſent; the

The Eye of Faith can behold him, though that of Senſe cannot: for *his Fleſh is Meat indeed, and his Blood is Drink indeed.* That Bread, and that Wine which he there imparts to us, ſhall become his very Body and Blood, in ſuch a Senſe, as he intended it, to every worthy, and faithful Receiver: It ſhall convey to us all the Benefits of his Body broken, and his Blood poured out on the Croſs; and unite us to him in our Bodies and Souls, after ſuch a Wonderful Manner, as none but they, who feel it, can conceive, and even they, who conceive it, cannot expreſs. Let us look then through the outward Symbols or Signs, to the Thing ſignified by them; and carry in our Ears, as we approach the Holy Table, that Voice of our Saviour to his doubting Diſciple, *Be not faithleſs, but believing.* Bleſſed and Happy is He, who, in this Inſtance alſo, though he doth not ſee, yet doth believe; he ſhall be vitally nouriſhed, and cheriſhed by the Food of this Paſchal Lamb, and his Soul ſhall be made Joyful in the Strength of this new Wine.

SERM. VII.

John vi. 55.

To

SERM. VII.

To that *Lamb of God, without Spot, or Blemiſh*, whoſe Sacrifice we are now about to commemorate, and repreſent, even the Lamb that was *ſlain for our Sins, and raiſed again for our Juſtification*, as on this Day, together with the Father, and the Divine Spirit, be aſcribed all Honour, Might, Adoration, and Praiſe, now and evermore.

Miracles

Miracles the moſt proper Way of proving the Divine Authority of any Religion.

A

SERMON

Preached at

Weſtminſter-Abbey,

On *Whitſunday*, 1716.

MARK xvi. 20.

And they went forth and preached every where; the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.

IN theſe Words, which ſhut up the Goſpel of St. *Mark*, we have an Account of the Means, by which the Preaching SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII.

ing of the Apoſtles became ſo wonderfully Operative and Succeſsful. It was not from any mighty Talent of Perſuaſion, any extraordinary Faculty of Reaſoning, with which they were endued; it was not by any intrinſic Evidences of Truth, which the diſtinguiſhing Doctrines they preached carried with them; nor by any other Method purely Human and Natural; but by a Divine Power and Aſſiſtance, which accompanied them in every Step they took, and miraculouſly bleſſed their Endeavours. *The Lord worked with them, and confirmed the Word with Signs following.*

By *Signs*, in Holy Writ, are meant all ſuch wonderful Operations, as are above the Skill of Man to contrive, above the Power of any thing in Nature, any thing but the God of Nature himſelf, or ſome Agent by him ſpecially commiſſioned and empowered, to perform. Such as ſpeaking ſtrange Languages on the ſudden, the Miracle of this Day; curing inveterate Diſeaſes in an Inſtant, by a Word only; giving Life to the Dead, or Eyes to one that

that was born blind. Theſe things being done to *ſignify* who are appointed by God, as the Meſſengers of his Will to Men, are, on that Account, fitly termed *Signs*; and of *theſe* the Holy Scripture every where ſpeaks, as the moſt proper and full Evidences of a Divine Miſſion and Authority. SERM. VIII.

When *Moſes* was ſent by God to the Children of *Iſrael*, he deſires ſome Credentials, by which it might appear, that God had ſent him; and God, in Anſwer to his Requeſt, arms him with the Power of Miracles: *Caſt thy Rod upon the Ground*, ſays he, *and it ſhall become a Serpent.— That they may believe that the Lord God of their Fathers hath appeared unto thee.* Exod. iv. 3. 5.

Our *Saviour* conſtantly appeals to his Miracles, as to a clear and ſufficient Proof of his Doctrine: *The Works that I do*, ſays he, *They bear Witneſs of me.* And he carries the Argument ſo far, as to make the whole Guilt of Men's Infidelity turn ſingly on this Article.---*If I had not done among them*, ſays he, *the Works* Joh. v. 36. John xv. 24.

which

SERM. VIII. *which none other Man did, they had not had Sin.*

And thus alſo reaſoned his *Apoſtles* and *Evangeliſts*. *Jeſus of Nazareth*, ſays St. *Peter, a Man approved of God, among you by Miracles, and Wonders, and Signs, which God did by him in the midſt of you.* *The Lord gave Teſtimony*, ſays St. *Luke, to the Word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by the Apoſtles Hands.* And here in the Text, *They went forth*, ſays St. *Mark, and preached every where; the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.*

Acts ii. 22.

Acts xiv. 3.

Miracles therefore being the Foundation, upon which both the Moſaic and Chriſtian Revelations ſtand; it may be of uſe to ſhew, how properly they were pitched upon by God for this purpoſe. And this will appear, if we conſider

I. *Firſt*, The common Senſe and Opinion of Mankind on this Head.

II. *Secondly*, The *General Nature* of this Sort of Evidence. And

Thirdly,

III. *Thirdly*, Some *peculiar Properties* and *Characters* of it. SERM. VIII.

Firſt, What the Common Senſe and Reaſoning of Mankind has been on this Head, will appear from this ſingle Reflexion; That all Religions, whether true or falſe, not only thoſe of *Moſes* and *Chriſt*, but even the Heatheniſh Superſtitions of every kind have, at their firſt ſetting out, endeavoured to countenance themſelves by Real, or Pretended Miracles. *Numa* at *Rome*, *Aimda* and *Brama* in the *Eaſt*, and *Mango Copal* in *Peru*, did, as Hiſtory informs us, thus go about to perſuade their Followers into a Belief of thoſe Religious Opinions, which they introduced, and into the Practice of their ſeveral Sacred Rites and Ceremonies. Even *Mahomet* himſelf is ſaid to have made ſome faint Attempts this Way, though, when he miſſed of Succeſs, he retreated to the great and ſtanding Miracle of the *Alcoran*, which was, he ſaid, ſent immediately from I.

SERM. VIII.

from Heaven to him by the Angel *Gabriel*.—So that Miracles have been ſecretly and unanimouſly agreed upon by all Men, as the proper Medium of proving any Religion to be of Divine Appointment; elſe, the Founders of all Religions would not thus indifferently have appealed to them; nor would they, who embraced thoſe Religions, have ſo univerſally ſurrendered themſelves up to their Authority.

I know, this Argument is, by the Enemies of Revelation, turned another Way, and made uſe of to prove, that ſince *All* Religions have, at their firſt Riſe, equally pretended to Miracles, and *Moſt* of them without Grounds; therefore the *reſt* have done ſo too: at leaſt, that this Way of Proof, which hath ſo often deceived Men, can never, with any Certainty, be relied upon. But this ſurely is a very unreaſonable Way of arguing; ſince, at the ſame rate, it might be proved, that there is no ſuch thing as Truth, or Reaſon in the World: for all Men on all ſides lay claim to it; and yet the

the far greater Part of Mankind muſt needs be deceived. The proper Inference in this Caſe is, not that, becauſe moſt Men, who would be thought Maſters of Truth, are not, therefore there is no ſuch thing as Truth; but on the contrary, that Truth is ſomewhere to be found, elſe all Men every where would not equally lay claim to it. SERM. VIII.

There are many Empiricks in the World, who pretend to infallible Methods of curing all Patients. Becauſe theſe are Cheats and Impoſtors, does it follow, that there are no able and ſkilful Phyſicians, no healing Virtues in Herbs and Minerals? Or rather, may it not from hence be ſtrongly concluded, that there muſt certainly be an Art of Medicine, built upon true Principles, and founded in the Nature of things; becauſe ſo many Men every Day advance groundleſs Claims to it, and ſo many others give in to their Frauds and Deluſions? Were there no Real and True Remedies, there would be no Foundation for ſuch Men to amuſe

the World with falſe ones; but they would, as ſoon as they appeared, be immediately exploded.

In like Manner, if no true Miracles had ever been done in Proof of a Divine Revelation, it is impoſſible to conceive, how ſo many falſe Religions ſhould have been ſupported by the Pretence of them, or how the Argument from Miracles ſhould at all times have had ſo ſtrong an Influence upon the Minds of Men. But

II. *Secondly*, As the *Common Senſe and Opinion* of Mankind favours this ſort of Proof; ſo will it appear to be in itſelf highly *Reaſonable and Neceſſary*, if we conſider the *General Nature* of it.

When any Perſon pretends a Divine Commiſſion to publiſh a New Doctrine; in order to procure its Reception, 'tis requiſite he ſhould be furniſhed with ſome competent Motives of Credibility; he muſt, by ſome Infallible Sign or Token, ſhew, that he was really ſent on that

that Errand, and not expect to be believed on his own bare Word and Affirmation. Now this Sign or Token, what can it be, but his doing ſomewhat which it is on all Hands confeſſed, that no one, but God, can do? that is, in other Terms, how can a Man prove his Miſſion, but by a Miracle? Will it be ſaid, that the Doctrine he brings, may be ſo pure and holy, and every way worthy of God, as to carry the Stamp and Evidence of its own Divine Original; that the very Nature of the Meſſage may clearly and fully evince, from whence the Meſſenger came? I ſee not how this can well be. A Doctrine may be very Holy and Good, and every way agreeable to the Conceptions we have of God, and yet not be of Divine Revelation. The Philoſophers among the Heathens uttered many ſuch Truths, as might have become them, had they been really Inſpired; and yet we believe not, for this Reaſon, that they *were* Inſpired, but that they ſpake merely from the Dictates of their own

SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII.

Reaſon, and from the General Conſent of the Wiſeſt Part of Mankind: and ſo may any other Man alſo, let the Doctrine he teaches be never ſo juſt and holy, unleſs he produces ſomewhat beſide the Doctrine itſelf, to prove that it was revealed to him. For though the Badneſs of any Doctrine, and its Diſagreeableneſs to the Eternal Rules of Right Reaſon, be a certain Sign that it did *not* come from God, yet the Goodneſs of it can be no infallible Proof that it *did*. Indeed when a good Man publiſhes a good Doctrine, and affirms that he had it from God, we may, for his own Sake, and for his Doctrine's Sake, be diſpoſed to give Credit to him; we may be inclined, perhaps, rather to be of Opinion, that the Thing is as he ſays, than that it is not; but we cannot be wrought up into a firm Belief, an unſhaken Aſſurance concerning it, merely by his Affirmation. He may, at the Bottom, not be ſo good a Man as he ſeems to be; and may therefore (it is poſſible) intend to deceive me; or he may have been himſelf deceived, and miſtaken a Dream,

a Dream, or ſtrong Imagination, for a Reality. Such things have ſometimes happened, and ſuch things may therefore happen again; and, while I have theſe Doubts and Poſſibilities before my Eyes, 'tis impoſſible I ſhould embrace his Authority with the full and entire Aſſent of my Mind. But if to his own ſolemn Affirmation he adds the Performance of ſome Work, which, all things conſidered, I have the utmoſt Reaſon to think he could not perform, without immediate Divine Aſſiſtance; that indeed, and nothing leſs than that, is a Proof, which I ought not, and am not able to withſtand. SERM. VIII.

It will, perhaps, be further objected, that, if the Doctrine taught appears to be in itſelf good, and reaſonable, 'tis no matter whether it is proved to be of immediately Divine Authority. For a good Man will receive a Doctrine evidently good and reaſonable, whether any one be divinely Inſpired to preach it, or not; and a Doctrine evidently evil and abſurd, he will not receive, on the Account of what-

SERM. VIII.

ever pretended Inſpiration. And therefore, what need of Miracles to make way for an Opinion, which, if agreeable to Reaſon, will make its own Way without their Aſſiſtance; and if contrary to Reaſon, can never be entertained by a reaſonable Creature, though it ſhould have ten-thouſand Miracles to ſupport it?

Now it muſt be confeſſed, that this Objection is ſo far of Force, as it relates to *Moral* Truths, and to whatever is diſcoverable by the Light of Natural Reaſon. There is indeed no Neceſſity for Miracles to induce a Belief of *Theſe*; nor is it pretended, that God ever employed them to this Purpoſe, to convince Men either of his Being, or Providence, or of the Eternal Differences of Good and Evil; becauſe *Theſe* Truths were of themſelves ſufficiently obvious and plain, and needed not a Divine Teſtimony to make them plainer. But the Truths, which are neceſſary in this Manner to be atteſted, are thoſe, which are of Poſitive Inſtitution; thoſe, which if God had not pleaſed to reveal them, Human Reaſon could not have diſcovered; and

and thoſe, which, even now they are revealed, Human Reaſon cannot fully account for, and perfectly comprehend. Such, for Example, are the Doctrines of Baptiſm and the Supper of the Lord, of the Reſurrection of the ſame Body, of the Diſtinction of Perſons in the Unity of the Divine Eſſence, and of the Salvation of Mankind by the Blood and Interceſſion of *Jeſus*. It is this kind of Truth that God is properly ſaid to reveal; Truths, of which, unleſs revealed, we ſhould have always continued ignorant; and 'tis in order only to prove theſe Truths to have been really revealed, that we affirm Miracles to be Neceſſary. And though in the Body of the Revelation itſelf, known and unknown Truths may be mixed, Doctrines Evident by the Light of Nature, with ſuch as we receive only by Inſpiration; yet 'tis for the Sake of the Latter of theſe, that Miracles muſt be done, not at all on the Account of the Former. So that Reaſon being no Competent Judge of thoſe Doctrines, to the confirmation of which Miracles are ſpecially adapted, cannot,

SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII. not, I ſay, by examining into the Nature of ſuch Doctrines, determine, that a Proof of them, by Miracles, is needleſs.

Hitherto I have only conſidered the General Nature of Miracles, as they are Acts of Supernatural Power, neceſſarily attendant on Revealed Doctrines, in order to promote their Reception.

Thirdly, I proceed now, in the laſt place, to ſhew, how well they are ſuited to this Purpoſe, by reaſon of ſome *Peculiar Characters* and *Properties* that belong to them. For, *Firſt*, They are extremely fit to awaken Men's Attention. —*Secondly*, They are the ſhorteſt and moſt Expeditious way of Proof.—And, *Thirdly*, They are an Argument of the moſt Univerſal Force and Efficacy, equally reaching all Capacities and Underſtandings.

1. In order to the Propagation of a New Doctrine, the firſt thing requiſite is, To create Attention, and rouze the Minds of Men, poſſeſſed with Prejudices, immerſed in Pleaſures, or Buſi-

neſs,

neſs, into an impartial Conſideration of what is propoſed. And this is beſt effected by Miracles; which being ſtrange and unuſual Events, cannot fail of drawing Mens Eyes towards the Doer of them, and of commanding their Attention and Obſervance. Curioſity is the firſt Step towards Conviction; and when once Men are poſſeſſed with a due Regard for the Meſſenger, they will be ſure to liſten carefully to the Meſſage he brings. The Fathers of the Eaſtern Miſſion knew this well, and being therefore deſtitute of the Power of Miracles, which might excite Men to inquire after their Opinions, and infuſe a Reverence for their Perſons, endeavoured to make up this Diſadvantage another way, and gain Admiſſion into the Preſence of the Princes and great Men of the Eaſt, by ſome Curious and Surprizing Works of Art. And having in this manner raiſed an Opinion of themſelves firſt, they preached the Goſpel with ſome Degree of Succeſs afterwards: Their Performances in Mechanics and Aſtronomy

SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII. nomy being inſtead of Miracles to them, by which they procured a favourable Hearing of the Doctrines they afterwards delivered.

2. 'Tis another great Advantage, which belongs to Miracles, that they are the ſhorteſt and moſt Expeditious Way of Proof. All other Ways of evincing the Divine Original of any Doctrine (ſuppoſing there were any ſuch) muſt needs be long and laborious; ſuch as it will take up much Time fully to explain and clear; and ſuch therefore, as muſt operate but ſlowly, and can make no great Advances, in any one Man's Life, towards converting the World. For Inſtance, ſuppoſe the Truth and Credibility of a Revealed Doctrine could be made out, by ſhewing its Connection with, and Dependence upon, other Truths, and by a regular Deduction of it, through a long Train of Conſequences, from known and avowed Principles of Reaſon; yet would this be a very tedious and irkſome Taſk, and would, in a long Time, gain but a little Ground

Ground upon an opinionative and diſputing World. Had this been the Method made uſe of to propagate Chriſtianity at firſt, how would the Courſe of it have been retarded? How impoſſible had it been for the Apoſtles to have obeyed their great Maſter's Commands, and to have preached the Goſpel to all Nations? At this rate, it is probable, that, inſtead of traverſing the ſeveral Parts of the Earth, and reducing Multitudes of every Nation and Climate to the Obedience of *Chriſt*, they had ſtuck in that very Spot, where they firſt entered upon their Miniſtry, and begun and finiſhed all their Labours within the ſhort Limits of *Paleſtine*. But by the Help of *Miracles*, they were enabled effectually to diſcharge their high Office: *theſe* were Engines fitted and proportioned to the Work aſſigned to them. One Dead Man raiſed, or Blind Man reſtored to Sight, who ſaw the thing done; and ten Thouſands came in afterwards, upon the Report of it. Other kinds of Proofs were fitted only leiſurely to looſen the

SERM. VIII. the Knots, which the Diſputers of this World tied, in order to give the Apoſtles Diſturbance in the Execution of their Miniſtry. But Miracles, like the Hero's Sword, divided theſe Entanglings at a Stroke, and at once made their Way through them.

3. The Third and laſt Advantage of this Way of Proof is, its *Univerſal Force and Efficacy*, as being equally adapted to all Capacities and Underſtandings.—Rational and Diſcurſive Methods are fit only to be made uſe of upon Philoſophers, Men of deep Reaſon and improved Minds; the generality of Mankind would be utterly inſenſible of their Force. The Lower, that is, the far greater Part of the World, are too much taken up in providing the Neceſſaries of Life, to be at Leiſure to conſider long Conſequences, and weigh Arguments. Or had they Opportunities for ſuch a Search, yet have they not the Abilities requiſite to purſue it. To them therefore ſome plainer, and more ſenſible Proof muſt be addreſſed; ſomewhat

that lies level to their Capacities, and of which they underſtand the Force at the firſt Propoſal: and ſuch a ſort of Argument is that, which is drawn from Miracles. There is no Man of ſo rude and unpoliſhed a Mind, no Man ſo ſtupid and inſenſible, but can carry his Reaſoning thus far; That, whoever does ſuch things, as he could not do, unleſs God were with him, if at the ſame time he affirms, that he received ſuch and ſuch Doctrines from God, we ought to believe him. There is no Subtlety, no Reach of Thought requiſite, to make this Reflexion; and this ſingle Reflexion is ſufficient to make a Man a *Chriſtian*. Whereas, if the World muſt have been convinced of old, as the Men, who doubt of every thing, and diſbelieve every thing, expect we ſhould convince them now, by ſtrict Demonſtrations, and long intricate Reaſonings; it is certain, that the greateſt Part of Mankind had lain under an inevitable Neceſſity of continuing Infidels. SERM. VIII.

We

SERM. VIII.

We ſee then, that *the Foundation of God ſtandeth ſure*, that the Proof of the Chriſtian Faith by Miracles is found and ſatisfactory. Let us adhere to it ſteddily, and devoutly adore the divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs, which contrived it for our Sakes! Let us not be moved by the little Cavils, and exceptions, with which perverſe and unreaſonable Men are uſed to encounter it; but let us remember, that in this State of Imperfection, there is ſcarce any Truth ſo bright and clear, but that an Induſtrious Stirrer up of Doubts may do ſomewhat towards clouding and darkening it. Let us not *ſit in the Seat, nor ſtand in the Way, nor walk in the Council of theſe Ungodly*; who ſtudiouſly undermine Principles, and delight to affront the Common Senſe of Mankind; who ſet up for a Repute by diſbelieving every thing, and are reſolved to pay a Regard to nothing, but their own deep Penetration and Prudence. Let us preſerve ourſelves free from that ſort of Caution and Reſerve, which, leſt it ſhould be impoſed

poſed upon by falſe Motives of Credi- SERM.
bility, will cloſe with none; and for VIII.
very Fear of being deceived, takes the
unavoidable Way towards being deceiv-
ed, by equally ſuſpecting every thing.
God defend us from ſuch a kind of Wa-
rineſs as this! and grant that we may
fooliſhly entertain ſome falſhood toge-
ther with Truth, rather than be Wiſe
to that Degree, as to eſteem every thing
a Falſhood! that we may be weak
enough to believe ſeveral Doctrines in
Religion, that are Eroneous and Vain,
rather than be ſo backward and hardy
as to believe nothing at all! For cer-
tainly, as downright Credulity and
Weakneſs has much the Advantage of
Infidelity, with regard to the Eaſe and
Peace of Mind it affords us in *This*
World, ſo it is more likely, if it errs
to be overlooked and pardoned by God
in *Another*. I had rather be the moſt
eaſy, tame, and reſigned Believer in the
moſt Groſs and impoſing Church in the
World (I mean that of *Rome*) than one
of thoſe Great and Philoſophical Minds,
who

SERM. VIII.

who ſtand upon their Terms with God, and ſtudy to hold out as long as they can, againſt the Doctrines of the Goſpel, and the Arguments that are brought to prove them.

To that God, who *alone doth wondrous Things*, and is alone able to bring ſome proud Reaſoners to acknowledge, that he *has done* them, be aſcribed all Honour, Praiſe, and Power, now and for ever!

The

The difficult Paſſages of Scripture vindicated from ſuch Objections as are uſually made to them; and proper Directions given, how we are to uſe them:

IN THREE

SERMONS

Preached at the

ROLLS,

In the Year 1711.

2 PET. iii. 16.

In which are ſome things hard to be Underſtood, which they that are Unlearned and Unſtable, wreſt, as they do alſo the other Scriptures, unto their own Deſtruction.

ST. *Peter*, in this Chapter, employs his Pen, in fortifying the Minds of thoſe *Chriſtians*, to whom he writes, SERM. IX.

SERM. IX. againſt that Scorn and Mockery they met with from ſome Profane Men, who diſputed the Certainty of this World's Diſſolution, and of *Chriſt's* coming to Judgment; and derided the Eager Expectations of the firſt Believers concern-

Ver. 4. ing it. *Where*, ſaid they, *is the Promiſe of his Coming? for, ſince the Fathers fell aſleep, all things continue, as they were from the Beginning of the Creation.* Againſt the Attempts of theſe Scoffers the Apoſtle arms them throughout this whole Chapter; aſſures them of the Reality of their Hopes, and of the Truth of the Divine Promiſes; and exhorts them to wait with Patience and Humility for their Accompliſhment.

Ver. 9. *The Lord*, ſaith he, *is not ſlack concerning his Promiſe (as ſome Men count Slackneſs) but is Long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to Repentance.*

Where he intimates the True Reaſon of *Chriſt's* delaying his Coming, to be, that he may give Room and Space to *all* Men every where to repent, and

Ver. 14, &c. embrace his Goſpel. *Wherefore, beloved,*

ſays he a little afterwards, *account that the Long-ſuffering of our Lord is Salvation; even as our beloved Brother* Paul *alſo, according to the Wiſdom given unto him, hath written unto you: As alſo in all his Epiſtles, ſpeaking in them of theſe things; in which are ſome things hard to be underſtood, which they that are unlearned and unſtable, wreſt, as they do alſo the other Scriptures, to their own Deſtruction.* SERM. IX.

He ſeems purpoſely to have made mention of St. *Paul* in this Place, not only becauſe he concurred with him in his Teſtimony concerning the End and Deſign of God's Long-ſufferance, but becauſe his Writings alſo had been objected againſt by thoſe very Scoffers, as *obſcure* and *unintelligible*. And therefore he took an Occaſion of mentioning *one* Paſſage out of them, that he might have an Opportunity of Vindicating the *Whole* from theſe Men's ſcornful Exceptions. *Account*, ſays he, *that the Long-ſuffering of the Lord is Salvation; even as our beloved Brother* Paul *alſo, according to the Wiſdom given unto him, hath written unto you.* The

SERM. IX. Place of St. *Paul* referred to, ſeems to be that in the Epiſtle to the *Romans*, Chap. ii. Ver. 4. *Deſpiſeſt thou the Riches of his Goodneſs, and Forbearance, and Long-ſuffering; not knowing that the Goodneſs of God leadeth thee to Repentance?* From which Parallel Text thus produced from St. *Paul*, he takes Occaſion to ſpeak of *All* his Writings, and of the Imputation which in *general* lay upon them. *As alſo in all his Epiſtles* (continues he) *ſpeaking in them of theſe things; in which* (i. e.) in which Epiſtles [I explain it ſo, notwithſtanding a Criticiſm taken from the *Greek*, which would make the Words, *in which*, belong to the *Things* ſpoken of in the Epiſtles, and not to the *Epiſtles* themſelves, which Criticiſm I ſhall not now trouble you with] I ſay therefore, *in which Epiſtles, are ſome things hard to be underſtood, which they that are unlearned and unſtable* (that are *Unlearned*, i. e. Unſkilled, and Unverſed in Divine things; and *Unſtable*, i. e. of light, deſultory, unbalanced Minds) *wreſt, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own Deſtruction.*

Having

Having thus cleared the Connection of the Text, I ſhall diſcourſe on it after the following Manner: SERM. IX.

Firſt, By enlarging a little on the Propoſition itſelf, which it contains: That there *are* in St. *Paul's Writings*, and in the *other* Scriptures alſo, *Things hard to be underſtood.* I.

Secondly, By giving ſome Account *how*, and for *what* Reaſon it has come to paſs, that the *Scriptures are*, and *muſt* be, in ſome meaſure *Obſcure:* How *neceſſary* and *unavoidable* it was, that there ſhould be *ſome* Paſſages in them *dark* and *difficult* even to *Thoſe*, who lived at the Time when they were written, and yet more ſo to *Us*, who live at this *Diſtance* from the Age of the Apoſtles. II.

Thirdly, By ſhewing you, that this carries no Reflexion at all in it upon the Divine Goodneſs or Wiſdom. And then in the III.

SERM. IX. *Fourth*, and laſt place, By raiſing ſome Obſervations from what has been ſaid, and preventing the Ill Uſes that may be made of it.

I. *Firſt*, this Propoſition is evidently laid down in the Text, That there are in St. *Paul's* Writings, *Things hard to be underſtood:* And it is plainly intimated, that there are ſuch things in the *Other* Parts of Holy Writ alſo; inaſmuch as they, who *wreſt theſe* Difficult Paſſages of St. *Paul*, are ſaid to *wreſt the other Scriptures alſo.*

It is indeed an undoubted Truth, and what no good *Chriſtian* is, I think, in the leaſt concerned to deny, that the Books, both of the Old and New Teſtament, are not every where equally clear and intelligible. They have, like Other Books, a Mixture of that which is Eaſy, with that which is Hard to be underſtood; a Great Deal that is Plain and Obvious, and ſomewhat alſo that is Obſcure and Difficult. Notwithſtanding

ing they were deſigned to contain a Revelation of God's Will to Men, yet was not that Revelation deſigned to partake every where alike of the Nature of its Great Author and Revealer, who is (in the Phraſe of St. *John*) *Light, and in whom there is no Darkneſs at all.* SERM. IX. 1 John i. 5.

Sometimes the Things ſpoken of are ſo Myſterious and Sublime, that our Limited and Weak Apprehenſions can hardly reach them. Sometimes the Manner of ſpeaking, even concerning Common things, is dark and dubious. The *Apocalypſe* is received into the Canon, together with the other Parts of Scripture; the Senſe of it has been much ſought and ſearched after by pious and inquiſitive Men in all Ages of the Church; and yet we have reaſon to believe, that it has never yet been thoroughly underſtood by any Man.

The Beginning of St. *John's* Goſpel is ſo far Intelligible, as that it plainly enough eſtabliſhes the Divinity of our Lord, and his Co-eternity with God the Father; but yet nobody, I think, will ſay,

SERM. IX. that the Senſe of every Term in that Chapter is ſo clear and eaſy, as that no *Chriſtian*, of whatever Rank or Degree, can, upon peruſing, and attentively conſidering the Whole, miſs the Meaning of it.

Even the Diſcourſes of our Bleſſed Lord are ſomewhat dark and intricate in
John iii. ſome Parts of them. That with *Nicodemus* about Regeneration; and that with the Men of *Capernaum* about Eating his
John vi. Body and Blood, have in them what will command and exerciſe our Utmoſt Attention. And his Account of the De-
Matth. xxiv. ſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, in St. *Matthew*, is ſo interwoven with that of the Day of Judgment, that it is very difficult to diſtinguiſh exactly, what Expreſſions belong to the One, and what to the Other.

And then, as to St. *Paul* in particular,
Gal. ii. 16. his Doctrines of Juſtification *by Faith*, and *not by Works*; of *Election* and *Reprobation*; his Deſcription of the Strug-
Rom. vii. gle between *Sin* and *the Law* in the Natural Man, as yet unaſſiſted by Grace; and

and his Account of the *Spiritual Body*, with which we are to riſe at the Laſt Day, are ſufficient Inſtances of the Truth of St. *Peter's* Aſſertion, That in him particularly *are ſome Things hard to be underſtood.* SERM. IX. 1 Cor. xv.

This Truth therefore being ſuppoſed, I proceed now, in the

Second Place, to give ſome Account, how Theſe obſcure Paſſages came to have a Place in Scripture: How it could *not* otherwiſe be but that the Holy Writings *ſhould*, in *ſome* Parts of them, be *dark* and *difficult*, even to Thoſe, who lived at the Time when they were written, and yet more ſo to Us, who live at this Diſtance from the Age of the Apoſtles. II.

And the plain Account of this Matter is, that, though the Scripture was written by Men under the immediate Inſpiration and Guidance of the Holy Ghoſt; yet were thoſe Men, at the Time of this Inſpiration, left to the free Uſe of their own Natural Faculties and Powers,

SERM. IX. Powers, and to expreſs themſelves, every one after their particular Faſhion and Manner: The Holy Ghoſt, though it preſided over the Minds and Pens of the Apoſtles, ſo far as to preſerve them from Error, yet doth not ſeem to have dictated to them, what they were to ſay, Word by Word, but in that to have left them, in good Meaſure, if not altogether, to themſelves. Which appears plainly from hence, in that we find the Several Writers of the New Teſtament always in their ſeveral Proper and Peculiar Characters; and as different in their Styles, almoſt, as One Human Author is from another.

For what is left to Men to expreſs, placed only under an Over-ruling Power, which neceſſitates them to ſpeak nothing but Truth, muſt need be expreſſed, though always Truly, yet, after the unequal, imperfect Manner of Men, ſometimes, more darkly, and ſometimes more clearly. I ſay therefore, that the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts, making uſe of their Natural Faculties and Ways

Ways of Speech, in committing to Writing the Truths delivered to them, it could not be expected, that they ſhould ſpeak always with the ſame Degree of Perſpicuity; becauſe no other Writer does ſo. SERM. IX.

Further, the Nature of ſome Things they delivered was ſuch, ſo high and heavenly, ſo obſcure and altogether unknown to Men, that the Language of Men could not but fail under them, when they were to expreſs them. They were of Neceſſity ſometimes to fall ſhort, in what they ſaid, of what they Imagined and Conceived; and, for want of fit and adequate Terms, to clothe their Thoughts in unequal and improper ones. Particularly as to St. *Paul*, who had been in the Third Heaven, and there heard things unutterable; was it to be expected, that, when he came down from thence, he ſhould have ſpoke of thoſe Myſteries, after a clear and ſatisfactory Manner? No, thoſe, to whom he ſpake, muſt have been in the Third Heaven too,

SERM. IX. too, thoroughly to have underſtood his Meaning.

It is no Wonder therefore, that there ſhould be Paſſages in Scripture of a doubtful and uncertain Meaning, even to *Thoſe*, who lived at the Time *when* that Scripture was penned. It is yet leſs a Wonder, that there ſhould be many more ſuch with regard to *Us*, who live at this *Diſtance* from the Age of the Apoſtles.

For conſider we with ourſelves, what manner of Men the Apoſtles were, in their Birth and Education; what Country they lived in; what Language they wrote in; and we ſhall find it rather Wonderful, that there are ſo few, than that there are ſo many Things, that we are at a Loſs to underſtand. They were Men (all except St. *Paul*) meanly born and bred, and uninſtructed utterly in the Arts of Speaking and Writing. All the Language they were Maſters of was purely what was Neceſſary to expreſs themſelves upon the Common Affairs of Life, and in Matters of Intercourſe with

with Men of their own Rank and Profeſſion. When they came therefore to talk of the Great Doctrines of the Croſs, to preach up the Aſtoniſhing Truths of the Goſpel; they brought to be ſure their Old Idiotiſms, and Plainneſs of Speech along with them. And is it ſtrange then, that the deep Things of God ſhould not always be expreſſed by them in Words of the greateſt Propriety and Clearneſs? SERM. IX.

The *Eaſtern* Manner of Thinking and Speaking, at that time eſpecially, when the Scripture was wrote, was widely different from *Ours*, who live in This Age, and This Quarter of the World. The Language of the *Eaſt* ſpeaks of nothing ſimply, but in the boldeſt, and moſt lofty Figures, and in the longeſt and moſt ſtrained Allegories. Its Tranſitions from One thing to Another are Irregular and Sudden, without the leaſt Notice given. Its Manner of expreſſing things is wonderfully ſhort and comprehenſive, ſo as to leave much more to be underſtood than is plainly and directly ſpoken.

SERM. IX. ſpoken. And this alſo cannot but contribute to make the Holy Writings ſeem, in ſome Parts of them, Obſcure to ſuch as are uſed to throw their Thoughts and their Words into a quite different Mold.

Beyond all this, We, at this Diſtance, cannot be exactly acquainted with the Occaſions, upon which ſome Parts of Scripture were written; which nevertheleſs are the true and proper Keys that open the Meaning of them. We ſee not the frequent Alluſions to Cuſtoms then known, and in uſe. We are in the dark to many of the Objections made to the Apoſtles Doctrine, which are tacitly obviated and anſwered by them in their Epiſtles, without being mentioned. Under theſe, and many other Diſadvantages, the Holy Scriptures muſt needs lie, with regard to the Obviouſneſs of their Senſe and Meaning, to Us at this Diſtance: And it can be no Blemiſh to them therefore, if that Meaning be not always obvious.

I might, with Truth, add one thing more upon his Head, That, where the Inter-

Interpretation of Scripture has any Difficulty, that Difficulty is often, in good meaſure, owing to the prepoſterous Endeavours uſed by ſome Men to explain and clear it. The Multiplicity of Comments written upon Scripture, and the Variety of all the *Poſſible* Senſes of any Text, ſtarted by thoſe Writers, have been ſo far from reaching the End aimed at, the Diſſipating all Doubts and Difficulties, that they have caſt a Miſt over many Places, which of themſelves were plain and clear; and have rendered ſome, that were really a little obſcure, yet more unintelligible. SERM. IX.

Numberleſs Volumes have been written on Scripture, in every Age almoſt, ſince it was publiſhed; and ſtill the Later Writers have generally ſtriven to diſtinguiſh themſelves from the Elder, by ſome New Gueſs, by ſaying ſomewhat that hath not been ſaid before. And thus the Mind of an honeſt Enquirer is perplexed and confounded, and, in the Midſt of a Thouſand *falſe* Meanings, eaſily loſes Sight of the *true* one.

But

SERM. IX. But ſtill it will be ſaid, that theſe are only *Rational* Accounts, *how* Scripture comes in *ſome* Places to be Obſcure, not at all *Juſtifications* of its *being* ſo. God, who inſpired the Apoſtles to write the Holy Scripture, might, if he had pleaſed, have ſuggeſted to them the very Words alſo, in which it was to be written; and, by that Means, have made it *All* clear and eaſy, and took away all Occaſion of Doubts, and Diſputes concerning it. And ſince he could have done ſo, why was it not done, if ſo be Scripture were deſigned for a Rule of Faith and Manners? For can a Rule be too certain? Can a Man know too plainly what he is to Do, and what he is to Believe?

In Anſwer to this therefore, I ſhall ſhew, as I propoſed in the

III. *Third* Place, That it carries no Reflexion upon the Divine *Goodneſs* or *Wiſdom*, that the Scripture is not in every Part *as* plain and clear, as it was *poſſible* to have been made.

For

For *Firſt*, the *Goodneſs* of God is by no means obliged to do every thing for us that is *poſſible* to be done, but only that which is *fitting* and *ſufficient*, in order to the *End* it deſigns. Now the *End* propoſed by God, in cauſing the Scripture to be written, is, to afford us a Complete Rule and Meaſure of whatever is to be believed, or done by us. If therefore, in all Points of Faith and Practice, Scripture is *ſufficiently* plain and clear, it is *as* plain and clear as it *need* to be; and it can be no Reflection on the Divine *Goodneſs*, not to have made it plainer. SERM. IX.

But now, that whatever is requiſite to be believed, or done by us, is *ſufficiently* Evident in Scripture, will appear from theſe Two Conſiderations.

1. The Darkneſs of Scripture in ſome *particular* Places does not hinder its being *generally* plain and clear. Its having *ſome* things in it *hard to be underſtood*, implies, that it has *but* ſome; and that *moſt* things in it are eaſy to be underſtood, lye open and level to the meaneſt

SERM. IX.

eſt Underſtandings. The Truth is, whatever Difficulties there are in Scripture, they are few and little, in compariſon of what is plain and intelligible there. Take it altogether, and it well deſerves the Character Holy *David* beſtows on it. That it is a *Lantern unto his Feet and a Light unto his Paths:* That *the Teſtimony of the Lord is ſure, and giveth Wiſdom unto the Simple: That the Commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth Light unto the Eyes.* And if in *general*, and for the moſt part, Scripture be perſpicuous and clear, we have Reaſon to think there is *enough* of it clear, to inſtruct us in the *Whole* of our Duty; and make us ſufficiently *Wiſe unto Salvation.* Eſpecially ſince, in the

Pſ. cxix. 105. Ver. 130.

Pſ. xix. 8.

2d Place, Nothing there, that is *hard* to be *underſtood*, is *neceſſary* to be *underſtood* by us: And therefore, whatever Truth is contained in any obſcure Place of Scripture, we may ſatisfy ourſelves, that the Knowledge, or Practice of it ſhall never be required at our Hands, upon

upon the Account of its being contained there. SERM. IX.

I ſay, upon the Account of its being contained there: For a neceſſary Doctrine, that is delivered obſcurely in *one* Place, may *yet* be Revealed clearly in *another*. And wherever it is clearly Revealed, we are obliged to take Notice of it. But whatever Doctrine is contained in *one* or *more* obſcure Texts of Scripture, and no where elſe clearly expreſſed, is not neceſſary to be embraced and believed by us; nor ſhall we be Condemned for not receiving it.

The *Goodneſs* of God is ſufficiently juſtified, in propoſing the Scripture as a Rule of Faith to us: For though it be not equally perſpicuous and clear throughout, yet it is in the main, and for the moſt part ſo; and whatever is hard to be underſtood, is on that very Account *not neceſſary* to be underſtood. But

Secondly, Neither is there any Reflexion by this Means caſt on the *Wiſdom* of God. For though it may be ſaid,

SERM. IX. if theſe hard Places are not capable of being underſtood, why were they written? why were they made Parts of the Revelation of God's Will to Men, if we are ſtill as much in the Dark to them, as if they had never been Revealed? Yet, to this it may, in the

Firſt place, be anſwered, that there is no Part of Scripture ſo obſcure, as to be *utterly* unintelligible. St. *Peter* ſays only, there are *ſome things hard*, but he ſays not, that there are *any impoſſible* to be underſtood. It is difficult indeed in ſome Places to reach the Senſe of the inſpired Writers: But ſtill it is not ſo difficult, but that it *may* be done, if, with Care and Attention, we ſtudy the Holy Scripture; if we free ourſelves from Prepoſſeſſions and Prejudices; if we take in all proper Helps, and make uſe of all proper Means, and, above all, if we ardently beg of God the Aſſiſtance of his Good Spirit, to teach, and enlighten us, and lead us into all Truth. I ſay there is no Difficulty ſo great in Scripture, but that, by the Su-

pernatural Illuminations of God's Spirit concurring with our Natural Endeavours, it is *poſſible* to be Maſtered; and therefore God did not inſpire the Holy Writers, to write any thing altogether in vain and to no purpoſe; for nothing written by them is perfectly *incapable* of being underſtood; only *ſome* things lie readier to our Sight, upon the Surface as it were of the Text, and *others* lie deeper, and we are forced therefore (in the Words of *Solomon*) *to dig for them, as for hidden Treaſures.* But, SERM. IX. Prov. ii. 4.

Secondly, The *Wiſdom* of God is further juſtified, in leaving theſe hard Paſſages, inaſmuch as there are ſeveral *Wiſe Ends* which it ſerves by it, and ſeveral *Weighty Reaſons*, which it has for ſo doing.

He left them on purpoſe to humble the Preſumption and Pride of Man, to Confound *the Wiſdom of the Wiſe* of this World, and to give us an Inſtance of the mighty Power of God, in making thoſe plain Men, the Apoſtles, utter ſuch great and ſublime Truths, as thoſe of the 1 Cor. i. 19.

SERM. IX. moſt improved Underſtandings among the Heathens, by the mere Light of Nature, never did, nor could do.

He left them on purpoſe to Create an awful Reverence of Mind in us towards Holy Truths; which, had they been all Eaſy of Acceſs, would, in a little time, have grown familiar, and cheap to us alſo.

To ſecure the Majeſty of Religion therefore he wrapped up ſome of the great Myſteries of it in Obſcurity.—— Pſ. xviii. 11. *He made* (as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks) *Darkneſs his Secret Place; his Pavilion round about him with dark Water, and thick Clouds to cover him.*

Further, He left them alſo, to Exerciſe our Induſtry, and to Engage our Attention. He deſigned the Holy Book to be ſuch, as that we might make it always our Companion and our Study: That our *Delight* might continually be Pſ. i. 2. (as *David's* was) *in the Law of the Lord*, and *in that* we might *meditate Day and Night*. In order to which, it was requiſite, that the Senſe of Every thing, Every

Every where, ſhould not be too plain, and obvious. For how then could we have found always freſh Matter for our Thoughts and Enquiries? No, the Treaſure of Divine Knowledge was neceſſarily *ſo* to be hid, in theſe ſacred Volumes, as not ſoon to be exhauſted; ſo as continually to provoke our Searches, and to feed our Mind with ever freſh Diſcoveries; ſo as that, how long ſoever we meditate upon it, we may have ſtill Room left for further Meditations. Were all plain, were all open there, the Mind would quickly droop, and the Attention languiſh, upon the repeated Views of that, which it was ſo well acquainted with, and knew ſo thoroughly. SERM. IX.

Again, God mixed together obſcure with plain things, deep with common Truths in Scripture, that what was Addreſſed to *All* might be Adapted to *Every* one's Capacity, The *Babes* in *Chriſt*, as well as *Grown* Saints, the *Weak* promiſcuouſly, and the *Strong*, were to read the Holy Scriptures. And therefore fit it was, that there ſhould be Food

SERM. IX. in it proportioned to both; *Milk* for the one, and *ſtrong Meat* for the other.

Yet *further*, Theſe Dark Doctrines and Puzzling Paſſages were inſerted, to be the Teſt of Ingenuous, of ſincere and well-diſpoſed Minds; to ſee, whether, when we were once ſatisfied that a Book came from God, we would acquieſce in every thing contained in it, and ſubmit ourſelves (without Diſputes or Cavils) as well to thoſe Parts of it, which *Shocked*, as to thoſe which Enlightened our Minds; or whether we would not (as many have done) lay hold of every obſcure Paſſage to the Prejudice of Scripture, though we had otherwiſe never ſo many Arguments for the Divine Original of it; and Reject the Authority of *all* that which is plain and clear there, for the ſake of *ſomething* which we do not Comprehend.

Finally, God left theſe Obſcurities in Holy Writ, on purpoſe to give us a *Taſte* and *Glympſe*, as it were, of thoſe great and glorious Truths, which ſhall hereafter fully be diſcovered to us in another World,

World, but which *now are*, in ſome meaſure, *hidden from our Eyes*; on purpoſe to make us earneſtly aſpire after, and long for that Bleſſed State and Time, when all Doubts ſhall be cleared, and the Veil taken off from all Myſteries: When *the Book*, that is now in ſome meaſure *ſhut*, ſhall be *opened*, and every one of *the ſeven Seals thereof looſed: When that which is perfect ſhall come, and that which is in Part ſhall be done away:* When we ſhall exchange Faith for Sight, Hope for Enjoyment, Reaſoning for Intuition, and ſhall not (as we do now) *ſee through a Glaſs darkly*, but *know, even as we are known.*

SERM. IX.

Rev. v. 5. 1 Cor. xiii. 10. Ver. 12.

To that bleſſed State God of his Infinite Mercy bring us all, *&c.*

SECOND

SECOND SERMON ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

2 PET. iii. 16.

In which are ſome things hard to be underſtood, &c.

IN my former Diſcourſe I ſhewed you, that theſe Words of St. *Peter* relate directly to the Writings of St. *Paul*; in which he owns, there *are ſome things hard to be Underſtood*; and that *They, who were Unlearned, and Unſtable, wreſted them, as they did the other Scriptures, to their own Deſtruction.* Whereby he intimates, SERM. X.

SERM. X. intimates, that there are alſo in the *other* Parts of Scripture, as well as in the Writings of St. *Paul*, Obſcure Paſſages, liable to be miſunderſtood, wreſted, and perverted by unlearned, and unſtable Readers.

I have therefore taken an Occaſion from hence, to diſcourſe to you at large concerning the *Difficult* Parts of Holy Writ, ſo as to take in the *General* Argument; and yet to keep my Eye more particularly all along, upon the Books of the *New Teſtament*, to which St. *Peter's* Words chiefly refer.

I propoſed to treat of this Subject under the *Four* following Heads.

I. *Firſt*, By enlarging a little on the Propoſition, allowed and laid down in the Text, That there *are* in St. *Paul's Writings*, and in the *other* Scriptures alſo, *Things hard to be underſtood.*

II. *Secondly*, By giving ſome Account *how*, and for *what* Reaſon it hath come to paſs, that the *Scriptures are* and *muſt*

muſt be, in ſome meaſure *Obſcure*: How *neceſſary* and *unavoidable* it was, that there ſhould be *ſome* Paſſages in them *dark* and *difficult* even to *Thoſe*, who lived at the Time when they were written, and yet more ſo to *Us*, who live at this *Diſtance* from the Age of the Apoſtles. SERM. X.

Thirdly, By ſhewing you, that this carries in it no Reflexion, either upon the *Goodneſs*, or *Wiſdom* of God: Not on his *Goodneſs*; becauſe though he has left *ſome things* in Holy Writ *hard to be underſtood*, yet he has left *enough* there *eaſy* and *plain*; enough to inform us clearly of the whole compaſs of what we are *bound* to believe, and to practiſe. Not on his *Wiſdom*; becauſe theſe *dark* Parts of Holy Writ have their Uſes, as well as the *clear* ones; there being many *Wiſe Ends*, and *Weighty Reaſons* for inſerting them; ſeveral of which I reckoned up to you in my laſt Diſcourſe;

Fourthly,

SERM. X. *Fourthly*, and *laſtly*, I was to raiſe ſome Obſervations from what hath been ſaid; to prevent the *wrong* Uſes that *might*, and to point out the *true* and *only* Uſe that *ought* to be made of it.

The *Two firſt* of theſe Heads have been fully ſpoken to. The *Third* has been entered upon, and in ſome meaſure cleared; and what remains behind of it, will fall into the *Fourth* and *Laſt* General Head, the enlarging on which ſhall be the Buſineſs of this *preſent* Diſcourſe.

And the Firſt thing I ſhall obſerve, from what has been ſaid on this Subject, ſhall be, The Folly and Unreaſonableneſs of thoſe Men, who endeavour, from the Obſcurity of *ſome* Parts of Scripture, *entirely* to deſtroy the *Authority* of it.

For thus they argue: The Bible, ſay they, is a Book ordered by God to be written for the Information of Mankind

kind in what they are to Believe and to Do. And can we think that ſuch a Book from ſuch an Author, ſhould have any Defects in it? Can it be imagined, that God would ſpeak to Man, and yet not ſpeak ſo as in every Caſe to be underſtood by him? Is he either not able, or not willing to expreſs himſelf clearly? If neither of theſe can be ſuppoſed without Blaſphemy, how comes it to paſs that this Volume is ſo full of Difficulties and Myſteries? That this Revelation of his Will wants a yet further Revelation, to give us a plain Account of its Meaning?

SERM. X.

Thus do the *Ungodly reaſon with themſelves, but not aright*; as will appear from theſe following Conſiderations. Wiſd. ii. 1.

It is a ſtrange Sort of Argument, ſurely, that a Book, which comes from God, muſt have nothing in it *Obſcure*, and *Hard to be Underſtood*. On the contrary, I think, it were much to be ſuſpected, that *ſuch* a Book as this was *not* of Divine Authority, if it *ſhould* be found to lie ready and open to the moſt ordinary

SERM. X. ordinary Apprehenſions, in *Every* Part and Paſſage of it. It is given to us, on purpoſe to open to us ſome Diſcoveries concerning the Divine Nature, its Eſſence, and ineffable Perfections; to inform us of myſterious Truths, the Secrets of Heaven, hid from Natural Reaſon, and from former Ages. And can a Book, do we think, that ſpeaks of theſe Deep Things of God, with which the Natural Man is utterly unacquainted, ſpeak ſo, as not to give us the leaſt Trouble in underſtanding it? Can that, like which *our Eyes never ſaw, nor our Ears heard, nor hath it entered into the Heart* to conceive any thing before, be told us in Words as eaſy to be apprehended, as thoſe, by which we expreſs the moſt Common things, that we every Day converſe with? It is not ſo when we firſt ſet ourſelves to learn any Human Art or Science. The Terms, the Principles, the Propoſitions of it are all at firſt Sight ſtrange and uncouth, and make no bright Impreſſion upon the Mind. They

1 Cor. ii. 9.

They Amaze, they Puzzle, but they do not Enlighten us; till, by repeated Views, we have made them familiar and eaſy to us. And why then ſhould we expect, that Divine Myſteries, and the Things of another World ſhould more eaſily be taught and learnt, than Human Arts and Sciences? The Obſcurity of the Subject, whatever it be, muſt needs cauſe a proportionable Obſcurity in the Expreſſion of it; and no Wonder then, if Scripture be dark in ſome Places, where it ſpeaks of things ſo remote from Human Knowledge and Apprehenſion. SERM. X.

Dark it muſt needs be, unleſs God, who miraculouſly enlightened the Minds of the Prophets and Apoſtles, when they were to write it, ſhould miraculouſly alſo open the Underſtanding of every one that comes to read it. So that the Difficulties occurring in ſome Paſſages of a Divine Revelation, are ſo far from being an Argument againſt its coming from God, that, on the contrary, it were not reaſonable to think it to be

SERM. X.

a Divine Revelation, if there were *nothing* Abſtruſe and Difficult in it.

Should it be further objected, that the Deſign of Scripture is, to Reveal God's Nature and Will to Mankind, to be a ſure Guide, and an eaſy Rule of our Belief and Practice; and it ought therefore, in order to the Attainment of this End, to be in every reſpect plain and clear; for to no purpoſe would it be given us by God as a Guide and a Rule, if it be Obſcurely and Doubtfully expreſſed.

To this the Anſwer is ready: That the Scripture, being intended by God, as a Rule of Faith and Manners, muſt needs be, and certainly is, *ſo far* clear, as to reach the *End* it is intended for; ſo far, as to enlighten our Minds in all neceſſary ſaving Truths, and to afford us, in plain intelligible Terms, all that Knowledge, that is requiſite to carry us to Heaven. And *thus* far we affirm the Scripture to be clear and eaſy. But it follows not, that it ought, on this Account,

count, to be plain and clear in every Part and Paſſage of it. If there be enough in it eaſy to be apprehended, it ſufficiently anſwers the End, for which it was deſigned, though there be ſome things in it, which are *not* ſo. And therefore the Objection fails in this, That it ſuppoſes Scripture to be written perfectly for *this* End, and for *no* other, the affording us an eaſy, familiar Rule of Faith and Manners. This indeed was the *chief*, but it was not the *only* End, propoſed in writing it. SERM. X.

Beſides this, it was intended (as you have heard) *ſo* to be written, as to humble the Pride of Men, and confound *the Wiſdom of the Wiſe*; ſo as to try our Probity, and to exerciſe our ſtricteſt Attention, and to employ our Induſtry; ſo as to create a Reverence and Awe in us of the Divine Revealer; and to give us an Inſtance of the mighty Power of God, in making thoſe plain Men, the Apoſtles, utter ſuch great and ſublime Truths, as thoſe of the moſt improved

SERM. X. Underſtandings among the Heathen, by the mere Light of Nature, never did, nor could do. In a word, ſo as to give us a light Taſte and Glympſe only of thoſe Truths, that were fully to be Revealed to us in another World; and, by that Means, to make us the more earneſtly reach out our Thoughts to, aſpire after, and long for the future and full Enjoyment of them. And, in order to attain theſe Ends, it was fit and requiſite, that *ſome* Parts of it ſhould be involved in Obſcurity; as I diſcourſed to you the laſt Opportunity. And therefore it muſt not be argued, that the written Word of God, being deſigned for a Rule of Faith and Action, muſt be perſpicuous *throughout*; becauſe there were *Other* Ends beſides this, *to which ſome* Parts of it were deſigned; and to the attaining which, the Dark and Difficult Places in Holy Writ contribute as much, as the plain and moſt intelligible Paſſages do, towards building us up in thoſe Doctrines that are neceſſary to Salvation.

But

But then it is further Objected, That this Way of accounting for the Obſcurity of Holy Writ in *ſome* things, ſuppoſeth it to be evident in *all* things neceſſary to Salvation: A Suppoſition which will not eaſily be granted by thoſe we have to deal with. For, ſay they, are not the Doctrines of the Divinity of *Chriſt*, and the Holy Ghoſt, and thoſe of the ſame Rank with theſe, neceſſary to Salvation? And yet they are not plainly and clearly contained in Scripture; for then reaſonable Men, upon reading Scripture could not have *doubted*, whether they were contained there, or not; much leſs in good Earneſt *believed*, that they were not contained there. SERM. X.

Now the true Account of this Matter is this:

Firſt, It is not pretended, that theſe Doctrines are plainly contained in *every* Text of Scripture, which ſpeaks of them; but only that in ſome *one* Text or *more* they are propoſed to us con-

SERM. X. vincingly, and clearly; and if a Truth be *once* delivered ſo clearly, as to leave no doubt, 'tis the ſame thing to us, who acknowledge the Divine Authority of all Parts of Scripture, as if it were *many* times there repeated. For Example, were there *no* other Text for the Proof of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, in the Senſe, in which the Church of God hath always profeſſed to believe it, but *that* only where our Saviour commands his Diſciples to *Baptize in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt:* Or that where St. *John* ſpeaks of the *Three Witneſſes in Heaven*; either of theſe Texts would be ſufficient to make that Doctrine an *Evident* Part of Scripture, though in all the *other* Paſſages uſually produced for it, it ſhould be allowed to be expreſſed obſcurely.

Matth. xxviii. 19.

1 John v. 7.

Again, neither is it pretended, that theſe Doctrines are any where, throughout the whole Bible, expreſſed with the *utmoſt* Degree of Evidence and Clearneſs, which Words are any ways poſſibly

ſibly capable of: But only that they are *ſo expreſſed,* that an honeſt impartial Mind cannot *well* miſs the Senſe of them. It might have been ſaid indeed, in ſo many Words, that *Chriſt,* and the Holy Spirit were, from all Eternity, diſtinct from the Father, and, together with him, one God bleſſed for Ever; and equally the Objects of our Religious Worſhip and Service. But though this be not ſaid there in ſo many Terms, it is ſaid however in ſuch, as an unbiaſſed well-meaning Man cannot miſtake; and he that is not ſo, though it ſhould have been ſaid in theſe very Terms, would perhaps have found a Way to have miſtaken, or rather wilfully to have perverted the Senſe of them. SERM. X.

The Truth is, God never deſigned to give us an Account of the Myſteries of Chriſtianity in Expreſſions every way ſo bright and clear, as ſhould prevent all poſſible Wreſtings and Miſconſtructions. For this had been to do too great Force to our Aſſent, which ought to be free and voluntary. This had been to rob us of

SERM. X. the Rewards due to Believing, and to take away the proper Teſt and Trial of Sincere and Ingenuous Minds.

Beſides, had all Points of Doctrine been delivered with ſuch a Degree of Exactneſs, been ſo minutely explained, ſo ſtrictly and cautiouſly guarded on all Sides, as to ſhut out the Poſſibility of any miſtaken Meaning, the Bible had been too Voluminous, and too ſubtle a Book for common Uſe. And though to ſome few diſtinguiſhing Heads, it might have given better Satisfaction, yet to the moſt, that is, to the Unlettered part of Mankind, it would have been ten times more Obſcure, and Unintelligible, than even now it is repreſented to be. So that upon the whole, it was extremely fit and proper, that theſe Doctrines ſhould be delivered with that Degree of Clearneſs, as to be *eaſily* underſtood; not ſo, as to be perfectly *incapable* of being miſunderſtood. It was requiſite, that they ſhould be aſſerted ſhortly and plainly, not that they ſhould be fenced about with all thoſe nice Diſtinctions, which

which could any way guard them from the Attempts of the moſt Captious and Unreaſonable. SERM. X.

And with *this* Degree of Clearneſs we affirm, that all *neceſſary* Truths *are* delivered in Scripture, *i. e.* with *ſuch* a Degree of Clearneſs, as is *neceſſary*. Nor does it weaken the Strength of this Aſſertion to ſay, that the Senſe of thoſe Paſſages in Scripture, which We think plain to this Purpoſe, is diſputed by ſome, and abſolutely denied by others; and therefore is not ſo plain as we imagine. For at this rate, there would, perhaps, be never a plain Text left in the whole Book of God. Since what Text almoſt is there, that has not been the Subject of different Interpretations and Opinions?

There is ſcarce any thing ſo abſurd, ſays an Ancient, in *Nature* or *Morality*, but ſome Philoſopher or other has held it. And there is ſcarce any thing ſo extravagant in *Divinity* (may we ſay) but that ſome obſtinate, opinionative Man or other has maintained it, and made a wretched

SERM. X. wretched Shift to countenance his Opinion by the Authority of Scripture, miſerably wreſted and perverted to his Purpoſe. But what then? This makes no more againſt the Perſpicuity of the Holy Writings, in all neceſſary Doctrines, than the Wild Opinion of that Old Philoſopher, who affirmed Snow to be black, diſproves the Clearneſs and Certainty of thoſe Informations, which proceed from the Senſes.

Let not a Man therefore ſay, that the Scripture is *not* plain in thoſe things, in which we pretend it *is*, becauſe in thoſe very things the Church of God hath underſtood it one way, and *Arius*, *Socinus*, or ſome ſuch Broacher of Hereſy, another. For this proves nothing, but that there have been Men hardy enough to deny ſomewhat, which all the World before them allowed: but it is by no means an Argument of the Obſcurity of Scripture Expreſſion, unleſs we could know certainly, that theſe Men were honeſt and upright in their Searches, acted with no By-deſigns, had no Vain End, which

which they propoſed to themſelves, of heading a Party, or baffling received Opinions; came to ſearch theſe Books without Biaſs, Prejudice, or any Pre-engagements to ſome Opinions of their own, which they were willing and reſolved to find there. Without all this, and a great deal more, be proved (which indeed is not capable of Proof) the Scriptures may be clear, though Men of clear Reaſon in other things do not, or will not underſtand them. SERM. X.

Well then, the Obſcurity of Scripture carries no Objection at all in it, either againſt the *Goodneſs*, or *Wiſdom* of God; for in all things *neceſſary* to be underſtood, it *is* obvious and plain; and in what is *unneceſſary* to be underſtood, there are many good and wiſe Reaſons, why it ſhould *not* be plain. In the mean time, let Thoſe, who reject Scripture, be pleaſed to find us out a Syſtem of Religion delivered by God, without any of theſe Difficulties in it. We deſire no more of them, but to leave us in Poſſeſſion of our Bibles, till they

can

SERM. X. can ſhew us a clearer Revelation, and more worthy of the Divine Revealer.

If to this they ſhall ſay (as many in our Own Times do ſay) What need of any Revelation at all? *Reaſon* is clear, and by *that* we may guide Ourſelves; God has implanted a *Light* in every one, *ſufficient* to ſhew him the Way to Heaven: We muſt aſk them, Whether *Natural Religion* ſpeaks ſo plainly in any *one* Point of Religion, but that *ſome* perverſe Man or other has contradicted it? And then, by their own Rule concerning the Obſcurity of Scripture, *that* Point is not plain from Reaſon, becauſe Rational Thinking Men have denied its Plainneſs; ſo that a Man, who, on the Account of the Obſcurity of Holy Writ, ſhall pretend to reject the *Chriſtian Religion*, and turn *Deiſt*, muſt, upon the ſame Account, reject *Deiſm* too, and turn *Atheiſt*. For there are a great many Things in the Notion of a God, and of that Worſhip, which *Natural Religion* directs us to pay him, that he can never ſatisfy himſelf about, nor thoroughly

underſtand. Nay, he muſt not ſtay at *Atheiſm*: neither, for the very ſame Reaſon; ſince no Syſtem of *that* kind can be contrived, which is not, in many Parts of it, obſcure and unintelligible. A great Inſtance of which we have in the Writings of that Modern *Atheiſt*, *SPINOSA*. In a Word, he muſt *be* nothing, *believe* nothing, be of no Opinion, but live under an *Indifference* to all Truths and Falſhoods, in a pendulous State of Mind; *neceſſitated* to act continually in order to ſome End *ſuppoſed* to be true, and yet *doubting*, whether there be any ſuch thing as *Truth*, or no; living under all the Agonies and Torments of a Rooted Scepticiſm. SERM. X.

Thus have I *conſidered largely*, and in ſome meaſure endeavoured to remove the *Firſt* Ill Uſe that is made of the Doctrine of the Text, by thoſe Perverſe and Unreaſonable Men, who take an Advantage, from the Confeſſed Obſcurity of ſome Parts of Scripture, to diſpute the Authority of it.

I now

SERM. X. I now haſten to mention ſome *Other Ill Uſes* that are made of what is owned here in the Text, that there are in the Inſpired Writings *Things hard to be underſtood.*

And indeed, after what has been already diſcourſed, I need do little more than mention them; for to repreſent them, will be to diſprove them.

Secondly, therefore, I obſerve, That it follows not from thence, as the *Romaniſts* would infer, that, becauſe of theſe Obſcure Paſſages in Scripture, there is abſolute Need of a ſupreme Judge in Controverſies, who ſhould determine the Senſe of every Text, and, among many *falſe* Meanings of it, infallibly guide us into the only *true* one. I ſay, it by no means follows from hence, that ſuch a Judge is neceſſary, for this plain Reaſon: Becauſe, as we have heard, none of thoſe Points, that are any ways obſcure and doubtful, are neceſſary to be determined. In theſe every Man may abound in his own Senſe, and have his own Opinions to himſelf;

and

and if he does but maintain thoſe Opinions with Sobriety and Modeſty, without rending the Unity, or diſturbing the Peace of the Church, though he may be under an Error, yet that Error ſhall not be rigorouſly imputed to him. SERM. X.

Much leſs does it follow from hence, *Thirdly*, That becauſe of Theſe Obſcurities in Scripture, therefore the Book itſelf ſhould be taken out of the People's Hands. For though there are *ſome* Things in it *hard* to be Underſtood, yet *many*, nay *moſt* Things there are *eaſy* to be underſtood, as that very Expreſſion in St. *Peter* intimates. And how unreaſonable therefore is it, to make *ſome* dark Paſſages in Holy Writ a Pretence of Locking up *all* at once, without Diſtinction, from the Generality of *Chriſtians*; becauſe there are a *few* things there, which they cannot underſtand, therefore to let them underſtand *nothing* at all? And this is ſo much the harder, becauſe (as we have heard) all that is neceſſary to be underſtood, is evidently contained in Scripture. So that to deprive a Man of that

SERM. X. that which he *can* underſtand, and which alſo it is neceſſary he *ſhould* underſtand, for the ſake of ſomewhat contained in the ſame Book, which he *cannot* underſtand and which it is no matter whether he *doth* underſtand or no, is an unreaſonable Piece of Cruelty.

I will be bold to ſay, that, upon the ſame Grounds that the *Roman* Church denies the People the Liberty of Reading Scripture, ſhe might have debarred them alſo of the Privilege of our Saviour's Converſation, while he lived upon Earth. For there were *ſeveral Things* in the Courſe of his Inſtructions, *hard to be underſtood*; and therefore, for fear of miſinterpreting thoſe Things, it was convenient, might ſhe have ſaid, that all Ignorant, Unſkilful Men ſhould utterly abſtain from his Company. But our Saviour did not deter the *Common* People from approaching him, becauſe now and then he ſpake a *dark* Parable. And therefore neither ought they to be with-held from reading his Goſpel, though there be ſome hard

hard things there, which, perhaps, they will read without underſtanding. SERM. X.

But *Fourthly*, and *laſtly*, Theſe Ill Uſes of the Doctrine of the Text being removed, the Trueſt, and moſt Proper Uſe we can make of it, is, from a Senſe of theſe *things hard to be underſtood* in Scripture, to form ourſelves into a deep Humility, and Lowlineſs of Mind, in the peruſing them; to read that Sacred Volume, with a Wiſe Jealouſy, and a Wary Diſtruſt of our own ſelves; not with a Conceited Opinion of our own Gifts and Parts, as if *we* alone were able to fathom all Depths, and to graſp all Myſteries. Except ye *receive* my Goſpel *as a little Child*, ſaid our Saviour, *Ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* And except ye read my Goſpel, as a little Child, may he be as well ſuppoſed to ſay, with ſuch an humble, and teachable Temper, with ſuch a Freedom from Vanity, Prepoſſeſſion, and Prejudices, as belongs to that Infant State, ye cannot enter into the deep things of it; thoſe things which are expreſly ſaid to Mark x. 15.

SERM. X. be *revealed to Babes, but hidden from the Wiſe.*

Matth. xi. 25.

Let us therefore weigh and conſider what we read as well as we can; but let us not too much indulge our private Reaſonings upon, and fanciful Expoſitions of Scripture. When we ſtick any where, let us modeſtly conſult thoſe who ſhould know better than we, and whoſe particular Buſineſs it is to underſtand and explain this ſacred Volume. Let us enquire what has been the Interpretation generally received in the Church of *Chriſt* in the Pureſt Ages of it. Or, if that be hard to come at, what is the Opinion of our *own* Church, that particular Member of the Myſtical Body of *Chriſt*, into which it has pleaſed the Divine Providence to engraft us. When we have found it, let us reſolve not lightly to vary from it; not without ſtrong Reaſons, and clear Convictions to the contrary; and even then to do it with Modeſty, and be content to enjoy our own Private Opinions, without endeavouring to make Proſelytes, or troubling the Peace of the Church, for the

ſake

ſake of them. Let us pay a due Deference, though not a blind Obedience, to ſo great an Authority. And let us not reverence Her *Deciſions* only, but make uſe of Her Admirable *Words* alſo, which ſhe puts into the Mouth of every One, who deſires to grow in the Knowledge of Scripture. SERM. X.

Bleſſed Lord, who haſt cauſed all Holy Scripture to be written for our Learning, Grant, that we may in ſuch wiſe hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digeſt them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy Holy Word, we may Embrace, and ever hold faſt, the bleſſed Hope of Everlaſting Life, which thou haſt given us through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

THIRD SERMON ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

2 PET. iii. 16.

Which they that are Unlearned, and Unſtable, wreſt, as they do alſo the other Scriptures, unto their own Deſtruction.

FROM the former Part of the Verſe I have already taken Occaſion to Diſcourſe to you largely concerning the Obſcurity of Holy Writ. In the latter Part of it, which I have propoſed now to handle, St. *Peter* gives us an Account of the Ill Impreſſions that theſe Difficult

SERM. XI.

SERM. XI. Parts of Scripture make often on the Minds of Weak *Chriſtians*; they are *wreſted* by them (he tells us) *to their own Deſtruction.*

By *Unlearned* Men, the Apoſtle means not ſuch as wanted that which we commonly call *Learning*, but ſuch as were not well ſkilled in *Divine Things.* By *Unſtable*, ſuch as, not being well grounded in the Faith, were, upon that Account, eaſy to be drawn aſide into pernicious Opinions and Deſtructive Errors. Such, he ſays, as Theſe, *wreſt*, i. e. miſunderſtand, miſapply, and pervert the Writings of St. *Paul*, and the other Scriptures: And This They do, to *their own Deſtruction:* That is, to their Eternal Ruin in another World. So that the Meaning of this whole Paſſage is, That ſome Men, not being firmly rooted and grounded in the true Faith of *Chriſt*, and being by Conſequence of an Uncertain and Wavering Judgment in Matters of Religion, were apt to make an Ill Uſe of the Difficult Places of Scripture, and to turn them to ſuch a Senſe

Senſe as deſtroyed Chriſtianity; and ſuch therefore as could not but end in the Deſtruction of Thoſe who aſſerted and maintained it. SERM. XI.

This at firſt Sight perhaps may ſeem an *hard Saying*. What! will ſome Men ſay, ſhall a Man be ruined Eternally for a miſunderſtood Place of Scripture? Shall They who own the Divine Authority of the Holy Writ (as 'tis plain theſe Perſons did) and who are ſtudious to know and Embrace the true Senſe of it every where, if in ſome Obſcure Paſſages they ſhould miſtake it, be anſwerable for that Miſtake, at the Hazard of their Salvation?

Better, at this rate, had it been, that the Bible ſhould never have been given Men, if it be ſo very fatal a thing to make a Wrong Expoſition, even of the moſt Doubtful and Intricate Parts of it.

I ſhall endeavour to give an Anſwer to this Complaint, by ſtating the Juſt Bounds, and ſhewing the Great Reaſonableneſs of St. *Peter's* Aſſertion; and ſhall then make uſe of the Truth of the

SERM. XI. Text, thus *Explained* and *Juſtified*, in ſome *Obſervations* and *Inferences*, that it will afford us.

In order to ſtate the Bounds of the Aſſertion, it will be fit to conſider, more particularly,

I. *Firſt*, What is ſtrictly to be *Underſtood* here by *Wreſting* of Scripture.

II. *Secondly*, What *kind* of Paſſages in Scripture they were, that are ſaid to have been thus *wreſted*.

I. As to the *Firſt* of theſe, it muſt be conſidered, That, to *Wreſt* Scripture, doth, in Strictneſs of Speech, ſignify, not only to miſinterpret, and miſunderſtand it, out of Weakneſs and Ignorance, as any *Chriſtian* may blamelefly do, but with ſome Degree of Perverſity and Wilfulneſs to force an Unnatural and falſe Conſtruction upon it, in order to make it fall in with our Corrupt Opinions and Prejudices, which we have before-hand entertained, and reſolved not to

to part with. Thus much is intimated by the Original Word στρεβλῶν which ſignifies, either to detort of turn away, or to torment, and put to the Queſtion. In the *Firſt* of theſe Senſes, when applied to Scripture, it implies, that theſe *Wreſters* of it Bent and Warped the ſtraight Line and Meaſure of their Duty, on purpoſe to make it ſuit with their own Crooked Opinions. In the *Second*, (which comes to much the ſame) that They did as it were Torment and Vex it, till it ſpake according to their Minds. SERM. XI.

Secondly, We are to obſerve, what *kind* of Paſſages in Scripture they were, which theſe Men are ſaid to have *Wreſted*. They were ſuch as were *hard to be underſtood* (ſo the preceding Words ſpeak) and ſuch as, for that very reaſon, there was no Neceſſity that they *ſhould* Underſtand, and yet theſe Men would pretend to Underſtand them, and to be very poſitive alſo, and peremptory in their Opinions concerning them. Further it appears, that theſe Places treated not of ſlight Indifferent Points of Doctrine, II.

SERM. XI. Doctrine, but of ſuch as were of the utmoſt Concern and Moment; ſuch as were the Foundations of the *Chriſtian* Faith, and the very Pillars that ſupported the whole Frame of Religion. I ſay, it appears, that they treated of ſuch Points as theſe, from the foregoing Parts of this Chapter, where St. *Peter* diſcourſes of the Day of Judgment, of its Certainty, and of the Wiſe Reaſons for which God was pleaſed to delay it; and repreſents ſome Men as *Scoffing* at
Ver. 4. theſe Doctrines, *and ſaying, Where is the Promiſe of his Coming? For ſince the Fathers fell aſleep, all things continue as they were.* To convince theſe Scoffers, he urges the Authority of St. *Paul* to them; who in his Epiſtles had maintained the ſame Aſſertions, not always however expreſſed with ſuch a Degree of Evidence and Clearneſs, as might be thought neceſſary to prevent all Miſtakes from whence Ill Men had taken an Occaſion to abuſe his Words to a quite different Senſe, and to pervert his Meaning. So that the Points of Doctrine, to which

which theſe Wreſted Texts referred, were Great and Fundamental ones; and which it was of the laſt Importance to be rightly inſtructed in. And to this we may add alſo a SERM. XI.

Third Remark, That this forced Interpretation of Obſcure Paſſages was in Oppoſition to other Plain and Evident Texts: For ſince (as I have already Diſcourſed to you) there is no Point of Moment, but what is ſomewhere or other plainly and perſpicuouſly delivered in Scripture, and ſince theſe Wreſted Places of Scripture, which St. *Peter* ſpeaks of, related, as you have heard, to Points of Moment; it follows, that they who Wreſted them, did it in Contradiction to other Plain and Perſpicuous Parts of Holy Writ.

The full Import of the Text, therefore, under theſe ſeveral Explications, will be, that They who, being miſled by Pride, and Vanity, or any other Luſt and Paſſion, perverted the Senſe of Scripture, in order to make it ſuit with their own wicked Practices, or juſtify their ill

SERM. XI. ill Opinions; who Vexed and Tortured Texts, in order to make them ſpeak ſuch Language as was for their Purpoſe; who did this in Paſſages very *hard to be underſtood*, and therefore not *neceſſary* to be underſtood, and in Points of Doctrine which were of the utmoſt Concern and Importance, and Interpreted theſe Paſſages, in relation to theſe Points, quite contrary to other plain and expreſs Places of Scripture; theſe Men, I ſay, are very juſtly and reaſonably ſaid, *to have wreſted the Scriptures to their own Deſtruction.* For ſurely there was ſuch a Complication of Inſincerity, Pride, and Obſtinacy in this *Manner* of wreſting Scripture, as deſerved ſuch a Condemnation.

And therefore to that Queſtion, Shall a Man be Eternally ruined for a miſunderſtood Place of Scripture? We anſwer, yes, doubtleſs, under thoſe Circumſtances which we have before Explained, if it be a *Fundamental* Point, about which he is miſtaken, and be much his *own Fault*, that he *is* miſtaken.

A miſ-

A miſunderſtood Place of Scripture may overthrow One of the Prime Articles of Faith, which God has made neceſſary to be believed in order to Salvation: Or it may deſtroy the Morality of the Goſpel, by introducing a Looſe Opinion concerning Life and Manners. By wreſting *One* ſingle Paſſage of Holy Writ, a Man may either *deny the Lord who bought him*, or *turn the Grace of God into Laſciviouſneſs*. And he that does either of theſe, cannot be ſaid to be ſeverely dealt with, though he be cut off from the Mercies of the Goſpel. For a Life led in Oppoſition to the Plain *Practical* Rules of Chriſtianity, or without that *Faith*, which Chriſtianity requires, are *either* of them a ſufficient *Cauſe* of our Condemnation. And therefore ſuch a Wilful Wreſting of Scripture, as occaſions either of theſe, muſt, in its Conſequence, be Damnable, and excuſe God in pronouncing this Sentence, from all manner of Severity or Rigour in his Dealings with us. This is the Account of the true Meaning of

SERM. XI.

2 Pet. ii. 1.

Jude 4.

St.

SERM. XI. St. *Peter's* Aſſertion in the Text, and of the Juſtneſs alſo, and Reaſonableneſs of it. Which Points being thus Stated and Cleared, I come now, as I propoſed, to make *uſe* of them, in ſome *Obſervations* and *Inferences* that they afford us. And

Firſt, It may be Obſerved, that the Scriptures were perverted, and turned by Ill Men to Ill Purpoſes, in the *Times* of the Apoſtles themſelves; that they were no *ſooner* Written, but they were *Wreſted*. From whence we may learn theſe Two Things.

1ſt, That if this happened in the *Apoſtles* Day, then well might it happen in *After-times*; eſpecially in *this* Age, which is at ſo great a Diſtance from the Time of the Apoſtles Writing. We may ceaſe to wonder, how it has come to paſs, that ſo many Controverſies have been ſtarted about the Senſe of Scripture, that it has been urged to ſo many wrong and different Purpoſes, and brought to ſupport and countenance ſo many Heretical Opinions in *Latter* Days, when we find that during the *Lives* of St. *Paul* and St. *Peter*

themſelves, it was thus inſincerely and unfairly dealt with. The Ink was hardly dry, which fell from the Apoſtles Pens, but Men began to diſpute about the Words that were wrote in it; to miſconſtrue, and miſapply them, every one to ſuch Doctrines as pleaſed him beſt; and to draw from the Inſpired Writings things deſtructive of Faith and Salvation, in the Face of the Inſpired Authors of them, without aſking, or at leaſt, without taking their Opinions in the Point; who ſurely had been the propereſt Men to have given an Account of their own Meaning, And if theſe things were ſo *then*, what Wonder is it, if ever *ſince*, and eſpecially *now*, in theſe Dregs of Time, there be Wilful Men found, who will oppoſe their own Vain Fancies and Novelties to the General Senſe of the whole Body of *Chriſtians*, and not ſubmit themſelves to ſuch a Concurrent Teſtimony in the Expoſition of Scripture, as though of the Utmoſt Moment towards determining our Aſ-

SERM. XI.

ſent,

SERM. XI.

ſent, yet falls far ſhort of Infallibility and Inſpiration.

From the ſame Obſervation alſo we may learn, in the

2d Place, That an Unerring Expounder of Scripture is not ſo Uſeful and Neceſſary, as ſome Men would make us believe it is; becauſe if there were ſuch an One, and he were known and acknowledged to be ſuch by all Men, yet would not that ſecure all Men from miſinterpreting Scripture, as is plain from the Inſtance of the Text. The Apoſtles were certainly Unexceptionable Interpreters of their own Writings, and infallible Judges of all Controverſies that could ariſe from them; and yet, notwithſtanding this, their Writings were in their own Time perverted, to countenance Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines; and ſo doubtleſs would they be now, though there were an Infallible Judge upon Earth ſtill. And Vain therefore is the Pretence of our Adverſaries of the Church of *Rome*, that ſuch an Infallible Judge is neceſſary, to aſſure us of the True Senſe of

of Scripture, and put an End to all Controverſies concerning it; ſince plain it is, that, when there was ſuch an Infallible Judge, he did not put an End to all Controverſies of this kind: There were ſtill a great many Proud, Pertinacious, and Opinionative Men left, that would not be concluded by him. SERM. XI.

Now if the Inferring the Neceſſity of God's acting in ſuch, or ſuch a Manner, from the Convenience that would redound to Mankind from his ſo acting, be no very good Argument in Divinity, even when that Convenience is allowed; what a Kind of Argument muſt that be, which would prove the Neceſſity of an Infallible Judge, from the great Expedience of it towards Determining all Controverſies, when even that Expedience itſelf (as we have ſeen) wants to be proved?

But to go on. We may obſerve from St. *Peter's* Aſſertion in the Text,

Secondly, What Temper of Mind, what Precautions, what Degree of Knowledge are requiſite, in order to make our En-

SERM. XI. quiries into the Obſcure Parts of Scripture Innocent and Uſeful to us. It is plain, that this is an Attempt of ſome Hazard, and that it may happen to coſt us dear as it did thoſe in the Text, if we do not fitly prepare and guard our Minds againſt the Danger of it. Which may be done, if we manage our Searches of this Kind by theſe following Rules and Directions.

1ſt, We muſt take care that the End we propoſe to ourſelves in theſe Enquiries be Good and Laudable. They muſt not be Entered upon out of mere Curioſity and Wantonneſs, not out of a vain and fruitleſs Deſire of Knowledge, nor out of a Deſign of being more Skilful and Learned than other Men, and of appearing to underſtand every thing; but the End of all our Searches in this Caſe ought to be, that we may improve in the Skill of thoſe Divine Truths which were on purpoſe committed to Writing, that there might be Matter in Holy Writ, fit always to employ our repeated Meditations, and to exerciſe our ſtricteſt Atten-

tion: That we may, by ſuch Searches, gain to ourſelves higher and more enlarged Apprehenſions of God, a truer and clearer Senſe of the deep Wiſdom of all his Myſterious Diſpenſations; and may thus raiſe up our Minds into greater Degrees of holy Admiration, Reverence, and Awe. SERM. XI.

We muſt intend to qualify ourſelves by theſe Searches for the removing the Objections raiſed by thoſe who are no Friends to Scripture, for the Juſtifying the darkeſt, as well as the brighteſt Parts of it, and making out to fair unprejudiced Men the beautiful Harmony of all the different, but agreeing Branches of the Divine Revelation.

2dly, We muſt come to this Work, as with a right Intention, ſo with a Mind rightly diſpoſed and qualified to purſue that Intention; not preſuming on our own Strength, not with an high Opinion and Conceit of our particular Gifts, Abilities, or Advantages, as if we alone were able to clear up all Difficulties, and to go to the Bottom of all Myſteries, and that nothing were too hard for

SERM. XI.

us. This is not a Temper of Mind, either naturally fitted for ſuch a Work, or which God delights to bleſs with ſupernatural Aſſiſtances and Diſcoveries. Now, if ever we hope to make our Enquiries of this Kind ſucceſsful and profitable to us, we muſt be ſure to conduct them with great Modeſty, with a becoming Diffidence and Diſtruſt of ourſelves, humbly and chiefly relying upon God for his Gracious Help and Aſſiſtance; and in order to it, putting up frequent and fervent Petitions to that good Spirit, which indited the Holy Scriptures, that he would pleaſe to enlighten us with the Knowledge of all the deep Myſteries contained there. 'Tis Humility and Devotion that principally qualify us for ſuch Searches as theſe; and will do more by themſelves towards giving a Man a true underſtanding of Scripture, than all the Gifts and Parts in the world will do, when ſeparated from them. For it is true in this Inſtance, as well as in many others, That *God reſiſteth the Proud, and giveth Grace to the Lowly.*

James iv. 6.

And

And as a good Way to keep alive and improve this Humility of Mind in us, let us be ſure, SERM. XI.

3dly, In our Searches of this Kind, ever to carry this Truth along with us (a Truth I have largely explained, and proved to you in a former Diſcourſe) that there is no Place of Holy Writ *hard* to be Underſtood, that is *needful* to be underſtood by us. If we maintain this Reflexion conſtantly upon our Minds, it will teach us not to lay too great Streſs upon theſe Difficulties, nor to employ too much of our Time upon them, ſo as to be in the leaſt taken off from conſidering what is more plain and profitable in Scripture, what can more eaſily and uſefully be underſtood, and is indeed more neceſſary to be underſtood by us. Some Men pore ſo much, and ſo long upon Paſſages of a diſputed Meaning, as if they thought it indiſpenſably requiſite to determine themſelves of one Side or other of the Queſtion; as if the Whole of Religion were concerned in ſuch difficult Enquiries; they are ſo bu-

SERM. XI.

ſy in opening and explaining *hard* Places, that they forget to meditate upon *plain* ones, and to govern their Lives under a lively and vigorous Senſe of the Doctrines contained in them: Which is doing juſt as the *Phariſees* did, *Tything Mint and Rue, and all Manner of Herbs and paſſing over Judgment and the Love of God.* Whereas (as our Saviour in that Caſe decides) *Theſe ought they to have done, and not to have left the Other undone.* A due Reflexion therefore upon this Truth, that the Underſtanding the Obſcure Places of Scripture, is not a thing ſtrictly required of us, or needful for us, will be of uſe to moderate our too great Eagerneſs in the Purſuit of ſuch kind of Knowledge; to render us leſs impatient and uneaſy under what we *do not* underſtand of it, and leſs poſitive and dogmatical in what we *do.* And thus the Two greateſt Temptations towards perverting Scripture will be removed, an Exceſſive *Curioſity* in Searches of this Kind, and an Over-weening *Fondneſs*

Luke xi. 42.

Fondneſs for our own private Interpretations and Opinions. SERM. XI.

4thly, If we would not wreſt the *hard Places in Scripture*, we muſt be ſure to make that an inviolable Rule and Law to ourſelves, never to expound them ſo as to *oppoſe Perſpicuous and Clear ones*; but ſo to order our Interpretation of Doubtful Points, as to make them fall in with the clear and intelligible Parts of the ſame Revelation; ſo as together with them to make up one Complete Body of Truths, perfectly agreeing with each other.

The beſt Way of knowing whether a Line be Crooked or not, is to apply it to One, that is confeſſedly ſtraight; and the ſureſt Way of not Erring in Obſcure Paſſages, is to make Plain Texts the Meaſure and Judge of them. The greateſt Part of the Abuſes and Miſinterpretations of Scripture have ariſen from a contrary Management; from Men's giving obſcure Texts a new and particular Senſe of their own *firſt*, and then growing fond of that Invention *afterwards*,

SERM. XI. *wards*, and reſolving to bring all the plaineſt Paſſages in Scripture, whether they will or no, to Countenance and Comply with it.

That we may carry ourſelves after a quite different manner in our Searches, it is fit for us to obſerve,

5^thly, and *Laſtly*, That the ſafeſt and ſecureſt Way of looking into theſe δυσνόητα of St. *Paul*, and the other Holy Writers, is, to poſtpone the Conſideration of them, till we have maſtered what is ſure and eaſy in Scripture, till we have rooted and grounded ourſelves in thoſe Points of Doctrine that lie obvious and open; and when we have done that, there will be no Danger of looking into any thing elſe, let it be never ſo hard, and never ſo obſcure. For either we ſhall hit upon the right Interpretation of it; or, if we do not, the Wrong one ſhall not hurt us. A Man that holds all that is plainly contained in Scripture, and all that is neceſſary to be held by him, may in that which is not plain, and not neceſſary, innocently abound in his own Senſe. For though he

he ſhould in theſe Matters miſtake in his Opinions, and miſtake the Senſe of Scripture, upon which he grounds thoſe Opinions; yet thoſe Miſtakes cannot be fatal, becauſe not fundamental. He can never maintain any thing *Directly repugnant* to the *Catholic* Faith, and *Evidently deſtructive* of it; and while he *does not*, he may maintain what elſe he pleaſes; and ſo he does it with Sobriety and Modeſty, and a due Deference to the Opinion of thoſe, who have a Right to be liſtened to in theſe things, his Error (if it be one) ſhall never prove dangerous, or be imputed to him. And this Remark is what is plainly ſuggeſted to us by the Words of the Text, where St. *Peter* tells us, that thoſe which wreſted the hard Places in St. *Paul's* Writings, and the other Scriptures, were *the Unlearned and Unſtable*, that is (as I told you) thoſe who, being not well grounded in the Faith, were Eaſy to be drawn aſide into pernicious Opinions and deſtructive Errors. From whence it follows, that the beſt Way to ſecure ourſelves from thus perverting

SERM. XI.

SERM. XI. verting what is obſcure in Scripture is, *firſt*, to render ourſelves *Learned and Stable* in what is plain; and fixing that as our Center, from whence we are not to be removed, we may extend our Thoughts and Opinions to what Circumference we pleaſe. That Faith which we keep *pure and undefiled* in Fundamentals, ſhall either enable us to find out thoſe Truths of leſſer Moment, that perfectly agree with it, or ſhall excuſe us before God, if we ſhould miſs of them. There will be a Probability from hence of our Underſtanding Obſcure Texts rightly; or if we do not, yet there will be a Certainty of our not incurring the Guilt of *Wreſting Scripture to Our own Deſtruction.*

Thus have I diſpatched the Second general Obſervation, which I raiſed from the Text, *(viz.)* to conſider from thence, what Temper and Qualifications of Mind, what Precaution and Degrees of Knowledge are requiſite, in order to make our Enquiries into the Obſcure Parts of Holy Writ Innocent and Uſeful to us.

I might

I might obſerve alſo from hence, in the 3d Place, That if Perverting *Obſcure* Paſſages of Scripture be a thing in itſelf damnable, as St. *Peter* aſſures us, it is; how much more certainly damnable is it to pervert *plain* ones? And then infer,

SERM. XI.

4thly, and *Laſtly* alſo, That if ſuch a Sentence be pronounced upon thoſe, who *Wreſt* Scripture; then ſurely a much higher Degree of Puniſhment is reſerved for thoſe, who *Affront* and *Ridicule* it. But becauſe the *Firſt* of theſe Points has been already in ſome meaſure intimated in the preceding Diſcourſe, and there occaſionally explained; and becauſe the *Second* is of too extenſive and concerning a Nature to be now conſidered; I ſhall therefore at preſent inſiſt upon Neither of them. They may perhaps employ our Reflexions on ſome other Opportunity.

A Diſcourſe on Religious Sincerity, wherein the true Marks and Teſts of it are fully ſet forth:

IN A

SERMON

Preached at

HAMPTON COURT,

October 15, 1710.

2 COR. xiii. 5.

Examine yourſelves, whether ye be in the Faith; prove your own ſelves.

THERE are three ſeveral Ranks and Orders of Men, into which thoſe *that Name the Name of Chriſt*, and profeſs his Religion, may be divided. SERM. XII. 2 Tim. ii. 15.

Some

SERM. XII.

Some have nothing more that the mere Name and Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, for in their Works they deny it; *being alienated from the Life of Chriſt*, and paying no manner of Obedience to his Laws; but living in the Open and Avowed Practice of all Kind of Pollutions. Others there are, who as manifeſtly adorn the Doctrine they embrace, and live up to the Rule which they profeſs, ſo far as Human Infirmity will ſuffer them. They have, by the Grace of God concurring with their Sincere Endeavours, ſubdued the Power of their Corrupt Luſts and Affections, ſo that little or no Diſturbance doth from thence ariſe to them; but they go on in the Paths of Virtue, and the Duties of Piety, evenly and regularly; Glorifying God, and Benefiting Men, and *ſhining more and more unto a perfect Day*. And to each of theſe the State and Condition of their Own Souls is known certainly and clearly. A ſtrong Conviction of Guilt terrifies the one, without any Offer of Excuſe, or Hope of Pardon; and the Conſcience of the Other bears Witneſs to their

Epheſ. iv. 18.

Prov. iv. 18.

their Uprightneſs, without Doubts, or Miſgivings. Between theſe there is a Middle State of Men, who are neither notoriouſly Evil, nor yet remarkably Virtuous; neither entirely given over to work Wickedneſs, nor yet thoroughly confirmed in Goodneſs; but in a Doubtful, Uncertain Way of Living, and Thinking; ſometimes ſtanding firm in Virtue, and ſometimes failing; ſometimes ſinning, and ſometimes repenting; ſometimes hoping, and ſometimes deſponding. SERM. XII.

To ſuch as theſe the Exhortation of the Apoſtle in my Text is directed: *Examine yourſelves, whether you be in the Faith; prove your own ſelves:* That is, Conſider your Condition impartially and thoroughly, try it by the Rules of the Goſpel; ſatisfy yourſelves once for all, whether you be true ſincere Believers, ſuch as God will accept. If you find that you *are*, reſolve, by his Grace, to *continue* ſuch to your Lives End; if you find you *are not*, reſolve to make yourſelves

SERM. XII.

ſelves ſuch, as ſoon as is poſſible. For nothing can be of more Moment to You, than this Knowledge, and theſe Reſolutions. *Examine yourſelves whether ye be in the Faith; prove your own ſelves.*

In order to aſſiſt you in this Enquiry, it ſhall be the Buſineſs of my preſent Diſcourſe to propoſe ſome few plain *Marks*, or *Teſts*, by which every Man, who entertains any Doubts of this kind (as very good Men ſometimes do) may, if he pleaſes, Try his own Sincerity, and fully ſatisfy himſelf, whether he be an hearty Believer, and a ſound Member of that Body, of which *Chriſt Jeſus* is the Head: Whether, and how far he hath obtained the great Chriſtian Perfection, which is to recommend all the reſt, I mean, that of *Sincerity*.

I. And, *Firſt*, The moſt obvious, and therefore the moſt ſatisfying Mark of *Religious Sincerity* is, if a Man, upon a Review of his own Thoughts, finds, that his

his Reſolutions of Obedience are *Univerſal* and *Unlimited*; without a Reſerve for any Favourite Sin, without excepting any particular Inſtance of Duty, wherein he deſires to be excuſed. *Then* (ſays the good Pſalmiſt) *ſhall I not be aſhamed*, i. e. *Then* may I ſafely confide in my Own Innocence and Uprightneſs, *when I have Reſpect unto thy all Commandments*; when I find myſelf equally determined to Obey every Divine Precept, and reſolved to allow myſelf in no Practice whatſoever, which the Law of God doth not allow of. And where this is not the Caſe, there can be no true Chriſtian Sincerity; which conſiſts in a true Bent and Inclination of the Will towards God; and the *Will* is never *Truly*, but when it is *totally* inclined towards him; when it is loſt, and ſwallowed up in the *Divine Will*; implicitly likes or diſlikes, chuſes or refuſes, what God hath before-hand approved or diſapproved by his Holy Precepts, or Prohibitions. Is a Man ſaid to be ſincere to his Friend, who betrays

SERM. XII.

SERM. XII.

him in any One Important Secret, committed to his Truſt, though he ſhould be faithful in many others? Is a Servant ſaid to be ſincere to his Maſter, who hath any Reſerved Caſes, wherein he reſolves not to conſult his Honour, or Intereſt? No more can a Man be reckoned ſincere towards God, who ſets up any ſingle Luſt, Inclination, or Thought, againſt what he knows to be the Divine Will and Pleaſure. And this is evidently the Reaſon of that Determination in St. *James*; *Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in One Point, he is Guilty of All. For* (as it there follows) *he that ſaid, Do not Commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not Kill. Now, if thou Commit not Adultery, yet if thou Kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law*; i. e. If thou neglecteſt to obſerve any *One* Divine Command, *knowing* it to be One, Thou art in *that* Inſtance as open, and declared a Rebel to the Authority Enacting it, as if thou ſhookeſt off thy Obedience to *All.*

James ii. 10, 11.

If

If then, upon a Careful Survey of ourſelves, we find, that we are, from the Bottom of our Souls, diſpoſed, and reſolved to comply with *All* the Terms of Duty (whether Grateful, or Ungrateful to Fleſh and Blood) which the Goſpel propoſeth to us; that it is our fixt Intent not to do, in any Caſe, what God had forbidden, nor to neglect what he hath enjoined; and that there is no Appetite, Deſire, or Deſign ſo dear to us, but we are ready to part with it, as ſoon as its Oppoſition to a Divine Command ſhall be made out; if this, upon Examination, prove to be our Caſe, we have great Reaſon to think well of ourſelves, and to Conclude, that we are in ſuch a State of Mind, as God will Accept, and Reward. A SERM. XII.

Second, and ſure Proof of *Religious Sincerity* may be drawn from a *General* View of the *Common* Courſe of our Lives, and Actions. If there be an *Even Tenor* of Goodneſs viſible in our Conduct, II.

SERM. XII.

duct, a *Regular and Steddy* Purſuit of Virtue, without any Groſs and Notorious Failures in Scandalous Inſtances, and Flagrant Acts of Wickedneſs; if, whenever we happen to fall by ſome great Temptation, we continue not long and quietly under the Guilt of it, but recover our Ground forthwith, and return to our Duty; proceeding on in the Paths of Obedience and an Holy Life habitually, and diſcharging our Obligations to God and Man pretty Evenly and Uniformly; then may we, from hence alſo, make a Comfortable Gueſs at the Goodneſs of our Condition in this World, and nouriſh very Promiſing Hopes to ourſelves of being happy in Another. 'Tis not to be expected, that while we are in the Body, we ſhould live altogether free from the Stains and Infirmities of it. In the very Beſt of Men, their Paſſions will ſometimes prevail over their Reaſon, and the ſtrongeſt Senſe of their Duty will give way to a Preſent Temptation. A Pious Man may, now and then, be very

very Cold and Languid in the Perform- SERM.
ance of his Devotions, and very full XII.
of Diſtractions and Wanderings. A
Meek and Good Man, by ſome unfore-
ſeen Accident, and by ſeveral Conſpir-
ing Circumſtances, may be raiſed up
into an Unbecoming Pitch of Anger
and Reſentment. A Temperate Man
may, through Importunity, or for want
of a due Guard over himſelf, be gra-
dually and inſenſibly betrayed into ſome
Degree of Exceſs. But then, in all
theſe Caſes, the Perſon falling, quickly
comes to himſelf again; the Fit is ſhort
and ſoon over, and is ſucceeded imme-
diately by Shame, and Remorſe, by
New Reſolutions, and more Vigorous
Endeavours. Conſider the Man altoge-
ther, and you will find, that the Gene-
ral Current of his Behaviour bears wit-
neſs to his Integrity, though he fail now
and then in particular Inſtances. And
God, who ſees all our Actions at once,
will Judge us upon the whole View,
and not ſingle out our Worſt Qualities,
without any Regard to our Beſt, in or-

SERM. XII.

der to exerciſe his Severity upon us. Let no Man therefore too haſtily, and too ſeverely condemn himſelf for frequent Infirmities, Slips, and Neglects; let no Man, who would judge aright of his Spiritual Eſtate, fix his Eye too intently on ſome particular Blemiſhes and Failings, of which, perhaps, he is conſcious; but let him look rather to the main Scope and Drift of his Thoughts, Words, and Actions; and by that let him try himſelf, as by the Juſteſt Meaſure and Standard of Sincere Goodneſs. How contrary to this is the Conduct of ſome Good and Pious Souls! How uſual is it for Perſons, well advanced in Piety, when they are making ſuch Enquiries as theſe, to dwell altogether on their Defects and Miſcarriages, without regarding the Regular Courſe of a Virtuous and Well ordered Life; and to condemn themſelves, as Falſe and Inſincere, becauſe they are not perfect and Sinleſs? God forbid, that Theſe ſhould be the Terms, upon which we are to be dealt with! For where then would be

the

the Man upon Earth, who could undergo the Scrutiny? *If thou, Lord, ſhouldſt be extreme to mark what is done amiſs, O Lord, who may abide it?* A SERM. XII. Pſ. cxxx. 3.

Third Sign and Teſt of *Sincerity* is, if a Man be not content with any determined Proportion of Goodneſs, nor willing to ſit down at ſuch a Point of Virtue, as he hath already attained, without aiming at a further Degree of Increaſe and Proficiency. For *the Path of the Juſt is as the ſhining Light*, ſays the Wiſe Man, *ſhining more and more unto a perfect Day:* That is, the truly Good are always aiming to be better, and how far ſoever they have run in the Race of Virtue, ſtill urge on-ward inceſſantly, and eagerly; *forgetting thoſe things which are behind, and reaching forth unto thoſe things which are before, they preſs towards the Mark for the Prize of the High-calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.* A Soul truly touched with the Senſe of its own Sins and Unworthineſs, and of the Infinite Mercies and Condeſcenſions of III. Prov. iv. 18. Phil. iii. 12.

SERM. XII. God towards us, will never Stint and Bound itſelf in its Returns; but will endeavour to Love as much, and to Obey as far as is poſſible. Let its Attainments be what they will, yet it knows, that they are ſhort, extremely ſhort of its Obligations; that the Meaſures of Grace, which we arrive at here, are only Earneſts, and Spurs, and Helps towards larger Communications, and higher Improvements; and, therefore, that a Man is never ſo good as he *ought* to be, who doth not heartily deſire and deſign to be as good as he *can* be; and breathe and pant after Perfection itſelf, even in *this* Life, though he be ſatisfied, that it is not fully attainable, but in *another*; ſince withal he is ſatisfied, that the more uniformly and vigorouſly he preſſes towards the Mark of Perfection in this Life, the nearer ſtill ſhall he approach to it, though he ſhall never reach it; and the nearer he is towards reaching it here, the more glorious ſhall be his Crown, and the more exalted his State of Perfection hereafter. And therefore,

if

if any one find himſelf inclined to circumſcribe his Practice within ſuch or ſuch Limits of Duty beyond which he never intends, nor expects to go; to hold faſt the Pleaſures of Life, and to enjoy as much of them as ever he can conſiſtently with the Principles of Religion; arguing always for the Utmoſt Extent of his Chriſtian Liberty, and deſiring to make his Obligations as Narrow as may be; ſuch an one hath Reaſon to conclude, that he is as yet ſhort of thoſe Qualifications, which are neceſſary to recommend him to the Judge of all Hearts, and Diſcerner of Spirits. SERM. XII.

IV. A *Fourth* Mark or Teſt by which a Man may diſcover, whether he be *ſincerely Religious*, or not, is, to Examine himſelf whether he be as inclinable to exerciſe the Graces and Virtues of the Chriſtian Life in Private, as in Public; without doing any thing merely for the Applauſe, or Fear of Men; but under a conſcientious Regard to Him, that

SERM. XII.

that *ſeeth in ſecret*, and under an Expectation that He, who *ſeeth in Secret, will*, at the great Day of Account, *reward him Openly*. For Example, let a Man conſider, whether he be as punctual and exact in performing his *Cloſet*-devotions, as in repairing to the *Public* Offices of the Church, and as Uneaſy under the Omiſſion of the *One*, as the *Other*; and when he prays in private, whether he be as Compoſed, and Reverent, and Devout in his Behaviour, as he is, when the Eyes of a great Aſſembly are upon him. Again, as to Points of Mercy, Generoſity, and Juſtice, let him reflect, whether he be as ready to give Alms in *Private*, as in the *Streets*; to defend the Cauſe of the Injured and Oppreſſed, and to ſupport a good Man's Reputation, in ſuch Circumſtances, when he is ſure never to hear of it again, as he would be, if all the World heard, and obſerved him. Finally, whether he be as [illegible] to defraud his Neighbour in a great Matter, or a ſmall, when he might do it ſecurely, without Fear of a Diſcovery;

Matth. vi 18.

very; as he ſhould be, if he were ſure to be arraigned in a Court of Judicature for it. He that can truly anſwer theſe Queſtions to his Own Satisfaction, hath no great Reaſon to diſtruſt his Sincerity; and He who cannot, hath as little Reaſon to depend upon it. SERM. XII.

Hypocriſy, when in Perfection, will act real Goodneſs ſo well, and put on the Shape and Diſguiſe of it ſo exactly, as to deceive even Him who plays the Part, as well as thoſe who look on, and create a Belief in him that he is what he ſeems to be; till he compares himſelf with himſelf, his Private with his Public Conduct: And that Touchſtone never fails to diſtinguiſh true from Counterfeit Piety; for the ſureſt indications of Mens Characters are thoſe Actions and Diſcourſes which flow from them, when they are off their Guard, and under no Awe, or Reſtraint from the Eyes and Obſervations of others.

A *Fifth* Thing, by which *Sincerity* in Religion manifeſts itſelf, is, when a Man appears to act, not out of Bye-aims, and V.

SERM. XII.

and a Private Intereſt, but out of a true Zeal for the Honour of God, the Intereſt of Virtue, and the good of Mankind. Would you ſatisfy yourſelf, whether you ſincerely love ſuch a Relation, ſuch an Acquaintance, ſuch a Friend? Conſider, do you, on all Occaſions, deſign to promote what is for their Service and Reputation? do you heartily deſire and endeavour Their good, without having an Immediate Eye on your own Advantage in it? If you do, 'tis certain that your Friendſhip and Affection are Sincere; for no Man can give better Proofs and Aſſurances of it. And the Caſe is the ſame with reſpect to God and Religion. If a Man feels himſelf inwardly warmed and acted by a true Concern for the Glory of God, for the Honour of his Name, and of his Worſhip; if he be apt to undervalue Worldly Regards, and petty private Views, in Compariſon of this great End; if in Evil Days, when the Manners of Men are extremely corrupted, he is not aſhamed to act up to ſtrict Principles of Virtue, which

which are not in Faſhion, nor is remiſs in the Practice of thoſe Duties, which he foreſees, will ſcarcely turn to account; eſpouſing firmly and unalterably the Cauſe of God, and Goodneſs, even when Hundreds on his Right Hand have gone off, and Thouſands have revolted on his Left: In a word, when a Man can be Looſe and Sceptical, with the General Applauſe of the World, and cannot be otherwiſe, without being deſpiſed, and pitied; and yet is ſo far from being tempted to a Compliance, that he doth what he can to ſtem the Torrent of Impiety, and to make his Virtue as Conſpicuous, as other Men's Vices: When a Man, I ſay, doth, upon Reflexion, find himſelf thus reſolved and qualified, he hath great Reaſon to be pleaſed with his Condition and to conclude, that it is well pleaſing to God alſo: For there is no ſurer Mark of Integrity, than a Courageous Adherence to Virtue, in the midſt of a General and ſcandalous Apoſtaſy. Which is the Reaſon that *Noah* and *Abraham*, *Lot* SERM. XII.

SERM. XII. *Lot* and *Daniel* have ſo high an Encomium beſtowed on them in Scripture, and are recommended as Patterns of a ſtrict, uncomplying Uprightneſs, to all ſucceeding Ages. Further,

VI. *Sixthly*, It is no ſlight Token of our *Sincerity* in Religion, if we are apt to ſuſpect it, on the Account of *little* things; which is often the Caſe of very Devout *Chriſtians*, and who have really the leaſt Occaſion to miſtruſt themſelves, of any Men. Perſons of a Nice and Tender Conſcience, very careful to pleaſe God, and very fearful of offending him, are, for that very Reaſon, prone to imagine that they fall infinitely ſhort of their Duty, if they do not, in every reſpect, exactly diſcharge it; and to diſquiet themſelves on this Account, with many Groundleſs Scruples and Terrors. Sometimes, the Principle, from whence their Repentance ſprang, gives them great Uneaſineſs; for they remember, that the Reformation of Heart and Life, in which they are now well

well advanced, began at firſt, not from a true and ardent Love of God; but from the mere Dread of Puniſhment. Sometimes their Unequal Performance of Religious Duties dejects, and diſpirits them; they find themſelves cold, and unmoved, when they are upon their Knees; in the moſt Solemn and Raiſing Parts of the Service, and even at the Reception of the Bleſſed Sacrament itſelf, they do not feel an holy Warmth kindling in their Hearts, nor their Mind melting under the Impreſſions that are then made upon it: And they conclude therefore, that there is a Vein of Hypocriſy running through all theſe Performances, which makes them Worthleſs, and Unacceptable. Now theſe, and ſuch as theſe, I ſay, are, for the moſt part, the Doubts and Miſgivings of the ſincerely Good and Pious; for they are ſuch as ſeldom trouble the Conſciences of Men of a different Character: And therefore thoſe very Scruples, which diſturb good *Chriſtians* ſo much, would, if rightly underſtood, give them Matter

SERM. XII.

ter of ſound Comfort and Encouragement; their very *Doubts* concerning the Goodneſs of their State, are, if they had but the Heart to think ſo, a ſure Reaſon why they ſhould not doubt of it. Let not then the true Saints and Servants of God perplex and afflict themſelves with ſuch Difficulties; let them not give up Religion, by their Means, to the Laughter and Scorn of Profane Men, who, from a few ſuch Inſtances as theſe, take Pleaſure to repreſent it, as reſiding only in weak Brains, as the Employment of Melancholy, and Diſeaſed Minds; and who ſtick not, in the Gaiety of their Hearts, to ſay, that a ſtrict Piety is good for nothing, but to make the Owners of it troubleſome to themſelves, and uſeleſs to the reſt of the World. O! let not any one, who wiſhes well to Goodneſs, diſſerve the Intereſt of it more, by his unreaſonable Scruples, than he promotes it, by his Exemplary Practice! But let him reſolve to ſummon up all his Reaſoning Powers, and to ſet them in Array againſt theſe inſignificant

ſignificant Phantaſms and Illuſions, which would certainly retire before this ſingle Reflexion (had a Man but the Courage to make and to believe it) that ſuch Niceties dwell uſually there, where there is leaſt Need of them, and are a real Sign of that *Sincere Piety*, the Want of which thoſe, who thus unhappily ſuffer under them, deplore. SERM. XII.

Seventhly, Another ſure Token of our *Sincerity* in Religion, is, when we delight to read the Holy Scriptures, and have a ſavory Taſte and Reliſh of them; when we find ſomewhat more in them than in mere Human Writings, and are apt to ſettle into a Pious Compoſure of Mind while we are peruſing them. When we come to them with Satisfaction and Eagerneſs, and are uneaſy under any long Diſcontinuance of our Converſation with them. This is the Token and Character, by which the experienced Pſalmiſt teaches us to know a good Man. *His Delight* (ſaith he) *is in the Law of the Lord, and in that Law doth* VII. Pſ. i. 2.

SERM. XII.

he meditate Day and Night. 'Tis true, it may ſometimes happen, that a Perſon of a ſound and ſincere Piety ſhall read the Holy Scriptures, without being much warmed, or affected with them. He may be under an Indiſpoſition and Languor of Mind; the Buſineſs, or Pleaſures of Life, and Wordly Objects may now and then take Poſſeſſion of his Heart, and ſhut the Door againſt Spiritual Impreſſions; but then this is not a Common and every Day's Caſe; he is for the moſt part well diſpoſed and affected towards this Divine Employment; his Appetite is generally awakened, and his Taſte very good; *and he rejoyceth in* Pſ. cxix. 162. *God's Word, as one that findeth great Spoils. Did not our Hearts Burn within us* (ſaid the good Diſciples) *while he* Luke xxiv. 32. *talked with us by the Way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?* But if a Man can frequently peruſe thoſe ſacred Pages, without any Degree of ſenſible Emotion and Concern, without being touched any ways by the Matter of them, or awed by the Majeſtic Man-

ner of Expreſſion, which diſtinguiſhes them from all other Writings; this is as ſure an Indication of a Sick Soul, as a Palate, which does not reliſh the moſt Savory Meats, is of a Diſeaſed Body. *The Fining Pot is for Silver, and the Furnace for Gold; but the Word of God trieth the Hearts:* And *it is Quick and Powerful* (ſaith the Author to the *Hebrews*) *and ſharper than any two-edged Sword; piercing even to the Dividing aſunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Diſcerner of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart.* And needs muſt that Heart be very hard and callous, and almoſt paſt Feeling, upon which ſo pungent and ſearching a Medicine doth not operate.

SERM. XII.

Prov. xvii. 3.

Heb. iv. 12.

Theſe are the ſeveral Marks or Teſts, by which we may Examine ourſelves, whether we are in the Faith, whether we are poſſeſſed of that truly *Chriſtian Sincerity* which God above all things requires. Let us do it honeſtly and impartially; let us apply the Rules which have been given, and take an Eſtimate

SERM. XII. of the True State and Condition of our Souls, by the means of them. If, upon a ſtrict Enquiry, we find that our Hearts are Right with God, let us give him the Praiſe, and reſolve by his Grace and Bleſſing, to keep them ſo, *all the while our Breath is in us, and the Spirit of God is in our Noſtrils*; and endeavour to grow in this Faith, and to increaſe in this Grace, more and more, *till we come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the Meaſure of the Stature of the Fulneſs of Chriſt.* But if, after a Serious Review of our Lives and Conſciences, it appears, that they are not ſuch as will ſtrictly bear the Teſt; let us form immediate Reſolutions of working ourſelves up into thoſe Degrees of Sincerity which we want, and of being as *Holy* and *Blameleſs*, as we ought to be, *in all Manner of Converſation.*

Job xxvii. 3.

Epheſ. iv. 13.

1 Pet. i. 5.

May we every one of us ſo reſolve, and be bleſſed in God's good Time, with an happy and comfortable Effect of our Reſolutions, through the mighty Aſſiſtances of his Holy Spirit, purchaſed for us by the Blood of his Dear Son! To which Eternal Three be for ever aſcribed all Honour, Adoration, and Praiſe. *Amen.*

FINIS.

00067055

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 15 June, 2016